

Harry Collingwood

"The Log of a Privateersman"

Chapter One.

The capture of the Weymouth—and what it led to.

The French probably never did a more audacious thing than when, on the night of October 26th, 1804, a party of forty odd of them left the lugger *Belle Marie* hove-to in Weymouth Roads and pulled, with muffled oars, in three boats, into the harbour; from whence they succeeded in carrying out to sea the newly-arrived West Indian trader *Weymouth*, loaded with a full cargo of rum, sugar, and tobacco. The expedition was admirably planned, the night chosen being that upon which the new moon occurred; it was a dismal, rainy, and exceptionally dark night, with a strong breeze blowing from the south-west; the hour was about two o'clock a.m.; there was an ebb tide running; and the ship—which had only arrived late in the afternoon of the previous day—was the outside vessel in a tier of three; the Frenchman had, therefore, nothing whatever to do but to cut the craft adrift and allow her to glide, silent as a ghost, down the harbour with bare poles, under the combined influence of the strong wind and the ebb tide. There was not a soul stirring about the quays at that hour; nobody, therefore, saw the ship go out; and the two custom-house officers and the watchman—the only Englishmen aboard her—were fast asleep, and were secured before they had time or opportunity to raise an alarm. So neatly, indeed, was the trick done that the first intimation poor old Peter White—the owner of the ship and cargo—had of his loss was when, at the first streak of dawn, he slipped out of bed and went to the window to gloat over the sight of the safely-arrived ship, moored immediately opposite his house but on the other side of the harbour, where she had been berthed upon her arrival on the previous afternoon. The poor old gentleman could scarcely credit his eyes when those organs informed him that the berth, occupied but a few hours previously, was now vacant. He looked, and looked, and looked again; and finally he caught sight of the ropes by which the *Weymouth* had been moored, dangling in the water from the bows and quarters of the ships to which she had been made fast. Then an inkling of the truth burst upon him, and, hastily

donning his clothes, he rushed downstairs, let himself out of the house, and sped like a madman down the High Street, across Hope Square, and so on to the Nothe, in the forlorn hope that the ship, which, with her cargo, represented the bulk of the savings of a lifetime, might still be in sight. And to his inexpressible joy she was; not only so, she was scarcely two miles off the port, under sail, and heading for the harbour in company with a British sloop-of-war. She had been recaptured, and ere the news of her audacious seizure had reached the ears of more than a few of the townspeople she was back again in her former berth, and safely moored by chains to the quay.

It was clear to me, and to the rest of the *Weymouth's* crew, when we mustered that same morning to be paid off, that the incident had inflicted a terribly severe shock upon Mr White's nerves. The poor old boy looked a good ten years older than when he had boarded us in the roads on the previous afternoon and had shaken hands with Captain Winter as he welcomed him home and congratulated him upon having successfully eluded the enemy's cruisers and privateers; but there was a fierce glitter in his eyes and a firm, determined look about his mouth which I, for one, took as an indication that the fright, severe as it undoubtedly was, had not quelled the old man's courage.

The capture of the ship by the Frenchmen occurred during the early hours of a Friday morning; and on the following Tuesday evening I received a message from Mr White, asking me to call upon him, at his office, next day at noon. Punctual to the moment, I presented myself, and was at once ushered into the old gentleman's private sanctum, where I found my employer seated at his desk, with several bundles of papers lying before him. He shook hands with me very cordially, and signed to me to be seated.

"Let me see, George," he commenced. "Your indentures will soon expire, will they not?"

"Yes, Mr White," I answered. "I shall be out of my time on the sixteenth of next month."

"Just so; just so. I thought that they would have about a month to run; but have been too busy the last few days to ascertain the precise date. Well, George," he continued, "I have come to the conclusion that the *Weymouth* must be laid up, for the present at all events. Her capture the other night has opened my eyes more completely than they have ever been opened before, to the risk of working an unarmed ship during war-time. Were I to continue to do so, and the ship should happen to be

captured, it would go far toward ruining me; and I am too old to endure such a loss; so I have made up my mind to lay up the *Weymouth* while the war lasts. But there is good money to be made, even in war-time, if a man goes the right way to work. Privateering is a very profitable business when it can be carried on successfully; and success depends as much as anything upon the kind of men employed. I have been having a chat with Captain Winter upon the subject, with the result that I have purchased the schooner that they are now finishing off in Martin's building-yard; and I intend to fit her out as a privateer; that being the kind of work, in fact, that she has been especially built for. Captain Winter will have the command of her, of course, with Mr Lovell as chief mate; and, George, upon the captain's very strong recommendation, I have determined to offer you the berth of second mate. It will take more than a month to complete the schooner and fit her for sea; and by that time your indentures will have expired. Captain Winter gives you a most excellent character, and has recommended you for the berth; and from what I have seen of you, my lad, I have come to the conclusion that I shall not go very far wrong in giving it to you. Nay, you owe me no thanks, boy; you have earned the refusal of the offer by your steadiness and industry, so it is yours, freely, if you like to have it. I do not want you to make up your mind and answer me yea or nay upon the spur of the moment; take a little time to consider the matter if you like, and let me know by the end of the week."

I needed no time for consideration, however; the offer was altogether too good and advantageous in every way to be left hanging in the balance, as it were. I therefore thankfully accepted it on the spot, and the question of pay and prize-money then being gone into and settled upon a very satisfactory basis, so far as I was concerned, I took my leave, and hurried off home to acquaint my relatives with my good fortune.

Now the reader will have gathered from the foregoing that at the period of the opening of my story I was a sailor, and quite a young man; and probably I need say but little more to complete the acquaintance thus begun.

My name is George Bowen, and I was the only son of my father, Captain Bowen, who was believed to have been drowned at sea—his ship never having been heard of after leaving England for the South Seas—when I was a little chap of only six years old. My sister Dora was born just about the time that it was supposed my father must have perished, and a year later my

poor mother died, broken-hearted at the loss of a husband that she positively idolised. Thus, we two—Dora and I—were left orphans at a very early age, and were forthwith taken into the motherly care of Aunt Sophie, who had no children of her own. Poor Aunt Sophie! I am afraid I led her a terrible life; for I was, almost from my birth, a big, strong, high-spirited boy, impatient of control, and resolute to have my own way. But Dora—ah! Dora, with her sweet, docile disposition, made ample amends for all my shortcomings, and in the end, by her gentle persuasiveness, did much to subdue my rebellious spirit and render me amenable to domestic discipline.

We were both exceptionally well educated, as education went then; for Uncle Jack—Aunt Sophie's husband—was a clever, long-headed fellow, who believed that it was not possible for a man to know too much; so Dora, in addition to receiving a sound English education, was taught French, music, and, in fact, the general run of what was then known as "accomplishments", while I, in addition also to a good sound English education, was taught French, Latin, and mathematics, including geometry, algebra, and trigonometry. I was allowed to continue at school until my fourteenth birthday, when, in consequence of my strong predilection for the sea as a profession, I was apprenticed by Uncle Jack to Mr White for a period of seven years. The first year of my apprenticeship was spent aboard a collier, trading between the Tyne and Weymouth; then I was transferred for three years to a Levant trader; and finally I was promoted—as I considered it—into the *Weymouth*, West Indiaman, which brings me back to the point from whence this bit of explanation started.

The modest cottage which I called home was situated in the picturesque little village of Wyke; I had therefore a walk of some two miles before me when I left Mr White's office; and as I sped along the road I beguiled the way by building the most magnificent of castles in the air. After the brief peace of Amiens, war had again broken out in May of the preceding year; and everybody was of opinion that the struggle which then commenced was destined to be of quite exceptional duration and severity. Then, again, it was well-known that Spain was only waiting for a sufficiently plausible pretext to declare war against us; and that pretext, it was believed, would be found in the capture by a British squadron of the three Spanish treasure-ships *Medea*, *Clara*, and *Fama*, news of which had just reached England. All this was of course simply disastrous from a commercial point of view; but for navy men and privateersmen it opened up a long vista of opportunities to win both distinction

and fortune; for it gave us the marine commerce of three rich and powerful nations—France, Holland, and Spain—as a lawful prey. Fortunes of almost fabulous magnitude had been made by lucky privateersmen during the last war; and was there not even then living in Weymouth the heroic Captain Tizard, who had captured a Spanish Plate ship and sailed into Plymouth Sound with his prize in tow, and a massive gold candlestick glittering at each mast-head? And if others had done such things, why not we? I knew Captain Winter for a man who not only had every detail of his profession at his fingers' ends, but who also combined the highest courage with the nicest discretion and a subtlety of resource that had already served us in good stead on more than one occasion. Then there was Robert Lovell, our chief mate, late of the *Weymouth*. He, like the captain, was a finished seaman; bold as a lion; and knew exactly how to deal with a crew, encouraging those who did their duty, while the idle skulkers found in him a terrible enemy.

Our late second mate—a man named Penrose, who had only been one voyage with us—had not given the skipper satisfaction; he had proved to be untrustworthy, overbearing, obstinate, unscrupulous, and altogether objectionable, so I was not at all surprised to find that he had been passed over; but it was a surprise, and a most agreeable one, too, to learn that the captain had recommended me in place of him. It was a responsible post, more so even than that of second mate in an ordinary trader; but I had no fear of myself, and was quite determined to leave nothing undone to justify "the old man's" recommendation.

Thus pondering, I soon found myself at home. Truth compels me to admit that I was greatly disappointed with the reception that my good news met with at the hands of Aunt Sophie and Dora. Instead of congratulating me they wept! wept because I was so soon to leave them again, and because of the dangerous character of my new berth! They declared their conviction that I should be killed by the first enemy that we might happen to fall in with; or, if I were fortunate enough to escape death, that I should be brought home to them a miserable, helpless cripple, minus a leg and arm or two, and all that Uncle Jack and I could say failed to shake that conviction. Dora even went so far as to endeavour to coax me to decline the berth; and only desisted upon my representation that, were I so foolish as to do so, I should inevitably be snapped up by the press-gang. That, and the indisputable fact—which they appeared to have forgotten—that there were at least a dozen men in Weymouth alone who had gone through the whole of the last war without receiving so

much as a scratch, brought them to regard the matter somewhat more resignedly; and at length, when they had all but cried themselves blind, Uncle Jack's cheery and sanguine arguments began to tell upon them so effectually, that they dried their tears and announced their determination to hope for the best.

Strange to say, although I had been at home six days, I had hitherto been so busy, running about with Dora and calling upon a rather numerous circle of friends that, up to the time of receiving Mr White's offer, I had not found time to do more than just become aware of the fact that Mr Joe Martin, our local ship-builder, happened to have a very fine craft upon the stocks, well advanced toward completion. Now, however, that it had come about that I was to serve on board that same craft as "dickey", I was all impatience to see what she was like; so, the next day happening to be fine, I set off, the first thing after breakfast, and, walking in to Weymouth, made my way straight to the shipyard. As I reached the gates I caught my first near view of her, and stood entranced. She was planked right up to her covering-board, and while one strong gang of workmen was busy fitting her bulwarks, another gang, upon stages, was hard at work caulking her, a third gang under her bottom, having apparently just commenced the operation of coppering. She was, consequently, not presented to my view in her most attractive guise; nevertheless, she being entirely out of the water, I was able to note all her beauties, and I fell in love with her on the spot. She was a much bigger craft than I had expected to see; measuring, as I was presently told, exactly two hundred and sixty-six tons. She was very shallow, her load-line being only seven feet above the lowest part of her unusually deep keel, but this was more than counterbalanced by her extraordinary breadth of beam. She had a very long, flat floor, and, despite her excessive beam, her lines were the finest that I had ever seen—and that is saying a great deal, for I had seen in the West Indies some of the most speedy slavers afloat. Altogether she impressed me as a vessel likely to prove not only phenomenally fast but also a perfect sea-boat. She was pierced for four guns of a side, with two stern-chasers; and there was a pivot on her forecastle for a long eighteen-pounder; she would therefore carry an armament formidable enough to enable us to go anywhere and do anything—in reason. Having thoroughly inspected her from outside, and gone down under her bottom, I next made my way on board, and went down below to have a look at her interior accommodation. This I found to be everything that could possibly be desired; the arrangements had evidently been carefully planned with a view to securing to

the crew the maximum possible amount of comfort; the cabins were large, and as lofty as the shallow depth of the vessel would allow; there was every convenience in the state-rooms in the shape of drawers, lockers, sofas, folding tables, shelves, cupboards, and so on; and the living quarters were not only light, airy, and comfortable, but were being finished off with great taste and considerable pretensions to luxury. While I was prowling about below I encountered Harry Martin, the son of the builder, who told me that Mr White, when completing the purchase of the vessel, had given instructions that no reasonable expense was to be spared in making the craft as thoroughly suitable as possible for the service of a privateer. I spent fully two hours on board, prying into every nook and cranny of the vessel, and making myself thoroughly familiar with the whole of her interior arrangements, and then left, well satisfied with my prospects as second mate of so smart and comfortable a craft.

As I was crossing Hope Square, toward the foot of Scrambridge Hill, on my way home again, I met Captain Winter, who, after congratulating me upon my appointment, informed me that he had secured *carte blanche* from the owner as to the number of the crew, and that he was determined to have the vessel strongly manned enough to enable her to keep at sea even after sending away a prize crew or two. He was therefore anxious to secure as many good men as possible, and he suggested that I could not better employ my spare time than in looking about for such, and sending to him as many as I could find. This I did; and as the skipper and Mr Lovell, the chief mate, were both industriously engaged in the same manner, we contrived, by the time that the schooner was ready for sea, to scrape together a crew of ninety men, all told—a large proportion of whom were Portlanders,—as fine fellows, for the most part, as ever trod a plank.

The schooner was launched a fortnight from the day upon which I had first visited her, and as she slid off the ways Joe Martin's youngest daughter christened her, giving her the name of the *Dolphin*. She was launched with her two lower-masts in, and was at once taken up the harbour and moored opposite Mr White's warehouse, where the work of rigging her and getting her guns and stores on board was forthwith commenced. Thenceforward I was kept busy every day, assisting the skipper and Mr Lovell in the task of fitting-out; and so diligently did we work that by mid-day of the 26th of November the *Dolphin* was all ataunto and ready for sea. And a very handsome, rakish, and formidable craft she looked, as she lay alongside the quay, her

enormously long and delicately-tapering masts towering high above the warehouse roof; her wide-spreading yards, extending far over the quay, accurately squared; her standing and running rigging as taut and straight as iron bars; her ten long nine-pounders grinning beneath her triced-up port-lids; her brightly-polished brass long eighteen-pounder mounted upon her forecastle; her spacious deck scraped and scoured until it was as white as snow; and her new copper and her black topsides gleaming and shimmering in the gently-rippling tide. Day after day, as the work of fitting-out progressed, the quay was crowded with people who came down to watch our operations and admire the schooner; and so favourable was the impression she created that, had we been in want of men, we could have secured volunteers in plenty from among the idlers who spent day after day alongside, watching us at work, and speculating among themselves—with their hands in their pockets—as to the measure of success that our bold venture was likely to meet with.

When we knocked off work at noon, to go to dinner, our work was completed; and as Mr White had taken care to secure our letters-of-marque in good time, it was determined that the *Dolphin* should proceed to sea that same evening, the crew having already signed articles, and been warned to hold themselves in readiness for a start at a moment's notice. As for me, my traps were already on board, and nicely arranged in my cabin—my sister Dora having, with her usual tenderness of affection, insisted upon attending to this matter herself—there was therefore nothing for me to do but to go home, say good-bye, and rejoin the ship. This ceremony I had always found to be a most painful business; but it was especially so in the present case; for I was not only once more about to brave the ordinary perils incidental to a sailor's life, but was, in addition, to be exposed to the still greater hazards involved in battle with the enemy. Poor Dora and my aunt were but too well aware, from the experience of others in the last war, what these hazards were; they knew how many men had gone out from their homes, hale, strong, and full of enthusiasm, either to find death in their first engagement, or to be brought back, sooner or later, maimed, helpless, and physically ruined for the remainder of their lives; and, as tender, loving women will, they anticipated one or another of these evils for me, and were therefore distressed beyond all hope of comfort. Nor could I shut my eyes to the possibility that their forebodings might come true, and that I might therefore be looking upon their dear faces for the last time. To bid them farewell, therefore, and tear myself from their clinging arms was a most painful

business; and it was not until I had returned to the *Dolphin*, and was busying myself about the final preparations for our departure, that I was able in some degree to recover my equanimity and get rid of the troublesome lump that would keep rising in my throat.

Chapter Two.

A foggy night in the Channel.

The town clock was striking four when, the muster roll having been called and all hands being found to be on board, we cast off the shore-fasts and, under the influence of a light, keen, frosty air from the northward, went gliding down the harbour under mainsail and flying-jib, fully two hundred people following us along the quay and cheering us as we went. The *Dolphin* was the first privateer that Weymouth had fitted out since the last declaration of war, and the enthusiasm was intense; for, in addition to the foregoing circumstance, she was the largest, most powerful, and most heavily-manned privateer that had ever sailed out of the port; our full complement numbering no less than ninety, all told, including a surgeon, every one of whom was either a Weymouth or a Portland man; consequently there were plenty of friends and relatives to see us start and bid us God-speed.

Upon clearing the harbour all sail was at once made upon the schooner, our object being, of course, to reach the open channel as quickly as possible—when we might hope to fall athwart a prize at any moment,—and a noble picture we must have made as, edging away to pass out round Portland, our noble spaces of new, white canvas were expanded one after the other, until we were under all plain sail, to our royal.

The day had been one of those quiet grey days that occasionally occur about the latter end of November; the sky a pallid, shapeless canopy of colourless cloud through which the sun at long intervals became faintly distinguishable for a few minutes at a time, then vanished again. There was little or no wind to speak of, the faint breathing that prevailed being from the northward. The air was very keen, the atmosphere so thick that our horizon was contracted to a limit of scarcely three miles, and it looked very much as though, with nightfall, we should have a fog. The moon was a long time past the full, and the small crescent to which she had been reduced would not rise

until very late; there was a prospect, therefore, that the coming night would be both dark and thick; just the kind of night, in fact, when we might hope to blunder up against a ship belonging to the enemy, and take her by surprise.

Captain Winter's plan was to run across to the French coast, make Cherbourg, and then cruise to the westward, in the hope that, by so doing, we should either pick up a French homeward-bound merchantman, or succeed in recapturing one of the prizes that the French privateers occasionally captured in the Channel and generally sent into Cherbourg or Saint Malo. Should we fail in this, his next project was to cruise in the chops of the Channel for a fortnight, and then return to Weymouth to replenish our stores and water; it being hoped that by that time something definite would be known as to the prospects of war with Spain.

Our course took us close past the easternmost extremity of Portland—the highest point of the miscalled "island"; and by the time that we had drifted across the bay—for our progress could scarcely be called more than drifting—the fog had settled down so thickly that, had we not by good fortune happened to have heard two men calling to each other ashore, we should have plumped the schooner on to the rocks at the base of the cliff before seeing the land. Even as it was, it was touch and go with us; for although the helm was put hard a-starboard at the first sound of the mens' voices, we were so close in that, as the schooner swerved heavily round, we just grazed a great rock, the head of which was sticking out of the water. But we now knew pretty well where we were, and hauling well off the land, out of further danger, we shaped a course that would take us well clear of the Shambles, and so stretched away athwart the Channel.

By the time that we had hauled off the land about a mile it had fallen as dark as a wolf's mouth, with a fog so thick that, what with it and the darkness together, it was impossible to see as far as the foremast from the main rigging, while the wind had fallen so light that our canvas flapped and rustled with every heave of the schooner upon the short Channel swell; yet, by heaving the log, we found that the *Dolphin* was slinking through the water at the rate of close upon three knots in the hour, while she was perfectly obedient to her helm. The most profound silence prevailed fore and aft; for Captain Winter had given instructions that the bells were not to be struck, and that all orders were to be passed quietly along the deck by word of mouth. The binnacle light was also carefully masked, and the

skylight obscured by a close-fitting painted canvas cover that had been made for the express purpose. There was, therefore, nothing whatever to betray our presence except the soft rustling of our canvas, and, as the same sounds would prevail on board any other craft that might happen to drift within our vicinity, we were in hopes that, by keeping our ears wide open, we might become aware of their presence before our own was betrayed. It is true that these precautions greatly increased the risk of collision with other vessels; but we trusted that the watchfulness upon which we depended for the discovery of other craft in our neighbourhood would suffice to avert any such danger.

In this way the time slowly dragged along until midnight, when I was called to take charge of the deck. Upon turning out I found that there was no improvement in the weather, except that the faint breathing from the northward had strengthened sufficiently to put our canvas to sleep, and to increase our speed to a trifle over six knots; but it was just as dark and thick as ever. Lovell, whom I was relieving, informed me that nothing whatever had been seen or heard during his watch; and that now, by our dead reckoning, we were, as nearly as possible, thirty miles south-by-west of Portland Bill. The skipper was still on deck; he had been up all through the first watch, and announced his intention of keeping the deck until the weather should clear. The night was now bitterly cold and frosty; the rail, the ropes coiled upon the pins, the companion slide, even the glass of the binnacle, all were thickly coated with rime, and the decks were slippery with it.

It was close upon two bells; and everything on board the *Dolphin* was silent as the grave, no sound being audible save the soft seething of the water past the bends, and the "gush" of the wave created by the plunge of the schooner's sharp bows into the hollows of the swell, when the skipper, who was standing near me on the starboard side of the binnacle, sucking away at a short pipe, caught hold of my arm and said in a low tone:

"Listen, Bowen! you have sharp ears. Tell me if you hear anything hereaway on the starboard bow?"

I listened intently for some seconds without hearing anything, and was about to say so, when I thought I caught a faint sound, as of the creaking of a boom; and at the same instant the two look-out men on the forecastle, forgetting, in the imminence of the danger, their instructions to be silent, simultaneously shouted, in sharp incisive tones:

"Hard a-port! Hard over! there's a big ship right under our bow!"

There was nothing whatever to be seen from where the skipper and I stood, but the cry was too imperative to be neglected; I therefore sprang with one bound to the wheel and assisted the helmsman to put it hard over, while the skipper rushed forward to see for himself what it was that was reported to be in our way.

I had but grasped the spokes of the wheel when I heard a cry, close ahead of us of:

"There's a small craft close aboard of us on our larboard beam, sir!" followed by a confused rush of feet along a ship's deck, and an order to "put the helm hard a-starboard, and call the captain!"

These sounds appeared to be so close aboard of us that I involuntarily braced myself against the expected impact of the two vessels; but the next moment, through the dense fog, I saw the faint glimmer of a light opening out clear of our foremast, saw a huge, dark, shapeless blot go drifting away on to our port bow, and heard a sharp hail from the stranger.

"Schooner ahoy! What schooner is that?"

"The *Dolphin*, privateer, of Weymouth. What ship is that?" answered the skipper.

"The *Hoogly*, East Indiaman; Calcutta to London. Can you tell me whereabouts we are?"

"Thirty-six miles south-by-west of Portland Bill," answered the skipper.

"Much obliged to you, sir," came the faint acknowledgment from the Indiaman, already out of sight again in the fog. This was followed by some further communication—apparently a question, from the tone of voice,—but the two vessels had by this time drawn so far apart from each other that the words were unintelligible, and the captain made no endeavour to reply; coming aft again and resuming his former position near the binnacle.

He and I were still discussing in low tones our narrow escape from a disastrous collision, some ten minutes having elapsed since we had lost sight of the *Hoogly*, when suddenly a faint

crash was heard, somewhere away on our port quarter, immediately followed by shouts and cries, and a confused popping of pistols, which lasted about a minute; when all became as suddenly silent again.

"Hillo!" ejaculated the skipper, turning hastily to the binnacle, as the first sounds were heard, and taking the bearing of them, as nearly as possible; "there's something wrong with the Indiaman; it sounds very much as though one of the rascally, prowling, French lugger privateers had run him aboard and—"

"D'ye hear that rumpus away out on the larboard quarter, sir?" hailed one of the men on the forecastle.

"Ay, ay, my lad, we hear it; we're not asleep at this end of the ship!" answered Winter. "Depend upon it, George," he continued to me, "the *Hoogly* has been boarded and carried by a Frenchman. There!" as the sounds ceased, "it is all over, whatever it is. We will haul up a bit, and see if we can discover what has happened. Starboard, my man!" to the man at the wheel; "starboard, and let her come up to full and by. Hands to the sheets and braces, Mr Bowen. Brace sharp up on the larboard tack; and then let the men cast loose the guns and load them. Call all hands quietly, and let them go to quarters."

The skipper peered into the binnacle again.

"Nor'-east, half east!" he continued, referring to the direction in which the schooner was now heading: "If we are in luck we ought to come athwart the Indiaman again in about twenty minutes—that is to say, if they have hove her to in order to transfer the prisoners."

He pulled out his watch, noted the time, and replaced the watch in his pocket. "Just slip for'ard, Mr Bowen, and caution the hands to be as quiet as possible over their work," said he. "And give the look-out men a hint to keep their eyes skinned. The French have undoubtedly taken the Indiaman by surprise; now we must see if we cannot give the Frenchmen a surprise in turn."

I went forward to execute my orders; and upon my return found the skipper, watch in hand, talking to the chief mate, who, with the rest of the watch below, had been called. Meanwhile the crew were at quarters, and, having cast loose the guns, were busily loading them, the work being carried on as quietly as possible. As I rejoined the skipper, the arms-chest was brought

on deck; and in a few minutes each man was armed with a cutlass and a brace of pistols.

By the time that these preparations were completed, the twenty minutes allowed us by Captain Winter to reach the scene of the recent disturbance had elapsed, and our topsail was laid to the mast, the word being passed along the deck for absolute silence to be maintained, and for each man to listen with all his ears, and to come aft and report if he heard any sound. Then we all fell to listening with bated breath; but not a sound was to be heard save the gurgle and wash of the water about the rudder as the schooner rose and fell gently to the lift of the sea.

In this way a full quarter of an hour was allowed to elapse, at the expiration of which the skipper remarked:

"Well, it is clear that, wherever the Indiaman may be, she is not hereabout. If, as I believe, she has been attacked, and has beaten the Frenchman off, she has of course proceeded on up channel; but if she has been taken, her captors have evidently headed at once for some French port, possibly having been near enough to have heard the hails that passed between us. If that was the case they would naturally be anxious to get away from the neighbourhood of their exploit as quickly as possible, for fear of being interfered with. And, assuming this supposition of mine to be correct, they will be certain to make for the nearest French port; which, in this case, is Cherbourg. We will therefore resume our course toward Cherbourg, when, if we are lucky, we may get a sight of both the Indiaman and the privateer at daybreak, if this confounded fog will only lift."

We accordingly squared away once more upon our former course, which we followed until morning without hearing or seeing anything of the vessels for which we were looking.

This being our first night out, and my watch being the starboard watch, I was relieved by Lovell at four o'clock a.m., and under ordinary circumstances should not have been called until seven bells, or half-past seven. But I was not greatly surprised when, on being called, I found that it was still dark, the time being five bells. It was Lovell who called me.

"George!" he exclaimed, shaking me by the shoulder. "George! rouse and bitt, my lad; tumble out! The fog is clearing away, and the cap'n expects to make out the Indiaman at any moment, so it's 'all hands'. Hurry up, my hearty!"

"Ay, ay," grumbled I, only half awake; "I'll be up in a brace of shakes."

And as Lovell quitted my cabin and returned to the deck, I rolled out of my bunk and hurriedly began to dress by the lamp that the chief mate had been considerate enough to light for my convenience.

When I went on deck I found that, as Lovell had stated, the fog was clearing away, a few stars showing out here and there overhead; moreover the wind had hauled round from the eastward and was now blowing a fresh topgallant breeze that had already raised a short choppy sea, over which the *Dolphin* was plunging as lightly and buoyantly as a sea-gull, doing her seven knots easily, although the skipper had taken all the square canvas off her, letting her go along under mainsail, foresail, staysail, and jibs. There was nothing to be seen, as the fog still lay thick on the water; but there were indications that it would probably lift before long, and Captain Winter had therefore ordered all hands to be called, so that we might be ready for any emergency that might arise.

"Sorry to have been obliged to disturb you, George, before your time," said the skipper, as I appeared on deck; "but the fog shows signs of clearing, and I want to be ready to act decisively the moment that we catch sight of the Indiaman."

"Quite so, sir," I replied. "Where do you expect to make her?"

"Ah!" he answered; "that's just the question that has been puzzling me. We did not see enough of her last night to enable us to judge very accurately what her rate of sailing may be; but I rather fancy, from the glimpse we caught of her, that she is something of a slow ship, and, if so, we may have run past her. At the same time, if the French have got hold of her—of which I have very little doubt—they would be pretty certain to crowd sail upon her in order to get well over toward their own coast before daylight. I have shortened sail, as you see, so as to reduce our own speed as nearly as possible to what I judge hers will be; but this schooner is a perfect flyer—there's no holding her,—and it would not surprise me a bit to find that we have shot ahead of the chase. I feel more than half inclined to heave-to for a short time; but Lovell thinks that the Indiaman is still ahead of us somewhere."

"Well," said I, "we ought to see something of her before long, for it is clearing fast overhead, and it appears to me that, even

down here on the water, I can see further than I could when I first came on deck."

It was evident that the skipper was very fidgety, so I thought I would not further unsettle him by obtruding my own opinion—which coincided with his—upon him; therefore, finding him slightly disposed to be taciturn, I left him, and made the round of the deck, assuring myself that all hands were on the alert, and ready to go to quarters at any moment. I passed forward along the starboard side of the deck, noticing as I did so that there was a faint lightening in the fog away to windward, showing that the dawn was approaching; and as I turned on the forecastle to go aft again, I observed that the fog was thinning away famously on the weather quarter. As I walked aft I kept my eyes intently fixed on this thin patch, which appeared to be a small but widening break in the curtain of vapour that enveloped us, for it was evidently drifting along with the wind. I had reached as far aft as the main rigging, still staring into the break, when I suddenly halted, for it struck me that there was a small, faint blotch of darker texture in the heart of it, away about three points on our weather quarter. Before I could be quite certain about the matter, however, the blotch, if such it was, had become merged and lost again in the thicker body of fog that followed in the track of the opening. But while I was still debating within myself whether I should say anything about what I fancied I had seen, I became aware of a much larger and darker blot slowly looming up through the leeward portion of the break, and apparently drifting across it to windward, though this effect was, I knew, due to the leeward drift of the break. This time I felt that there was no mistake about it, and I accordingly cried:

"Sail ho! a large ship about a point on our weather quarter!"

And I hurried aft to point it out to the skipper before it should vanish again. He looked in the direction toward which I was pointing, but was unable to see anything, his eyes being dazzled in consequence of his having been staring, in a fit of abstraction, at the illuminated compass-card in the binnacle. Neither could Lovell see anything; and while I was still endeavouring to direct their gaze to it, it disappeared.

"Are you quite certain that your eyes were not deceiving you, Mr Bowen?" demanded the skipper rather pettishly.

"Absolutely certain, sir," I replied. "And what is more, I believe it to be the Indiaman; for just before sighting her I fancied I saw another and smaller craft about two points further to

windward, and astern of the bigger ship; and I am now of opinion that what I saw was a lugger."

"Ay," retorted the skipper; "you fancied you saw a lugger; and so, perhaps, under the circumstances, would naturally fancy also that you saw the Indiaman. Did anybody else see anything like a sail astern of us?" he demanded in a low voice, addressing the crew.

"Yes, sir," answered a voice from the fore-castle. "I looked directly that I heard Mr Bowen sing out, and I fancied that I saw something loomin' up dark through the fog on the weather quarter."

"Another fancy!" ejaculated the skipper. "However," he continued, "you may be right, Mr Bowen, after all. How far do you suppose the stranger to have been away from us?"

"Probably a matter of three miles or thereabout," I answered. "The smaller craft would perhaps be a mile, or a mile and a half astern of her."

"Then," said the skipper, "we will haul the fore-sheet to windward, let our jib-sheets flow, and wait a quarter of an hour to see what comes of it. If you are correct in your surmise, Mr Bowen, we ought to see something of these strangers of yours by that time."

"And I have no doubt we shall, sir," answered I. "And if I may be allowed to offer a suggestion, it is that we should bring the schooner to the wind, so that she may eat out to windward of the Indiaman, all ready for bearing up and running her aboard when she heaves in sight."

"A very good idea, Mr Bowen! we will do so," answered the skipper.

The main- and fore-sheets were accordingly flattened in, when the schooner luffed up to about south-east, and slowly forged to windward, athwart what I believed to be the track of the Indiaman.

Meanwhile, the dawn was coming slowly, while the fog was gradually thinning away under the influence of the freshening breeze, so that we were by this time able to distinguish the heads of the breaking waves at a distance of fully half a mile. As for me, I kept my eyes intently fixed upon the grey cloud of vapour that went drifting away to leeward past our weather

quarter; and presently, when we had been hove-to about ten minutes, I caught sight of a thickening in the fog thereaway that, even as I looked, began to grow darker and assume a definite shape.

"There she is, sir!" I exclaimed, pointing out the darkening blot to the skipper; and by the time that he had found it, that same blot had strengthened into the misty outline of a large ship under studding-sails, running before the wind, and steering a course that would bring her diagonally athwart our stern, and within biscuit-toss of our lee quarter.

"Ay! there she is, sure enough!" responded the skipper eagerly. "Now," he continued, "the next thing is to find out whether she is the Indiaman or not, without arousing the suspicions of those aboard her. Haul aft your lee-jib and fore-sheets, there, my lads; we must not present the appearance of lying in wait for her. Luff all you can without shaking," to the man at the wheel; "I do not want the schooner to move fast through the water. We must let yonder ship pass near enough to us, if possible, to be able to read the name on her stern."

"I do not think there is much doubt about her being the Indiaman, sir," said I; "for if you will look out here, broad on our weather quarter, you will see what I take to be the lugger that has captured her."

"Ay, true enough, I do see something! You have sharp eyes, George, and no mistake," answered the skipper. "Yes, there certainly is something there; and, as you say, it looks uncommonly like a lugger! Well, she is a good two miles off. We shall have time to run the big fellow aboard and take her before that lugger is near enough to trouble us. Stand by, there, some of you, to jump aloft and loose the topsail when I give the word. Hillo, what is that? A gun from the lugger, by the hookey! They have made us out, and don't like the look of us, apparently, so they have fired a gun to wake up the people aboard the prize. Ha! now they have seen us aboard the big ship too, and are taking in their stunsails, to haul to the wind, I suppose. But you are too late, my hearties!" apostrophising the ship, now less than a cable's length from us; "you will be to leeward of us in another two minutes. Boy, bring me my glass. You will find it slung in beackets in the companion."

On came the ship, near enough now for us to see that she was undoubtedly an Indiaman, and as undoubtedly British. The people on board her were evidently in a great flusteration, for they had started to take in all the studding-sails at once, and a

pretty mess they were making of the job, most of the studding-sails having blown forward over the fore side of the booms. While they were still battling with the unruly canvas the ship swept, yawing wildly, close past our lee quarter; so close, indeed, that no glasses were required, for even in the faint light of the growing dawn it was possible to read with the unaided eye the gilt lettering on her stern—“*Hoogly, London.*”

Chapter Three.

Our first success.

“That settles the matter for good and all!” exclaimed the skipper, now in rare good-humour, as he pointed to the Indiaman’s stern. “Up with your helm, my man,” to the man at the wheel; “let her go broad off. We will pass under the Indiaman’s stern, and board her from to leeward. Away aloft there and let fall the topsail, some of you. Mr Lovell, you will take twenty men—I don’t suppose there are above forty Frenchmen aboard that craft—and board by the main and mizzen chains as we touch. You will have to be smart about it, as I do not want to remain alongside, grinding the schooner’s side to pieces, a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. Take the ship; and, as soon as you have secured possession and driven the prize crew below, haul your wind, keeping us between you and the lugger. The moment that you and your party are aboard I shall haul off; and you may leave me to deal with that fellow to windward. You will make the best of your way to Weymouth, of course. See that your men freshen the priming of their pistols at once; and then station them, half by the main rigging, and half by the fore, ready to jump at the word.”

“Ay, ay, sir!” responded Lovell, as he hastened away to select his twenty men. The topsail was by this time sheeted home, and the men were mast-heading the yard. The skipper sprang upon the rail, steadying himself by the weather main swifter, to con our schooner alongside; and I, in obedience to an order from him, went forward and gave the word for those who were not of the boarding-party to arm themselves with muskets, and pick off any of the Frenchmen who might show their heads above the rail.

It took us less than ten minutes to close with the Indiaman; and as we ranged up on her lee quarter and swept alongside a party

of some ten or a dozen jabbering and gesticulating Frenchmen jumped up on her poop and saluted us with an irregular fire of musketry, which, however, did no harm; and upon our people returning the fire three of the Frenchmen fell, while the rest tumbled off the poop in such a desperate hurry that our fellows were fairly convulsed with laughter. The skipper conned us alongside in such a masterly style that I do not believe the hulls of the two vessels actually touched at all—at least, I was unconscious of any shock—yet we were close enough for the two boarding-parties to spring with ease and certainty from our rigging into the Indiaman's channels; and the next moment, as they tumbled in over the ship's rail, our helm was eased up, and the vessels sheered apart, without having carried away so much as a rope-yarn. There was a tremendous scuffle on the Indiaman's deck for perhaps half a minute, with a great popping of pistols, the sound of heavy blows, cheers from our lads, loud execrations on the part of the Frenchmen, a shriek or two of pain at some well-directed cut or thrust, then a rush forward, during which we remained some twenty fathoms to leeward of the Indiaman, ready to sheer alongside again and render assistance if necessary; and then Lovell sprang up on the poop and hailed that he had secured possession of the ship, and would haul his wind as soon as he could get in the studding-sails. Thereupon our helm was put hard up, and we wore short round, bracing sharp up on the starboard tack to intercept the lugger, which craft was now foaming along under all the canvas that she could spread.

She was a big lump of a craft, of her class, measuring, according to my estimation, fully a hundred and fifty tons; and she appeared to be very fast. It was light enough by this time, what with the increasing daylight and the clearing away of the fog, for us to see that she mounted four guns—probably six-pounders—of a side, and there was something very like a long nine-pounder covered over by a tarpaulin, between her fore and mainmasts. She was well to windward of us, and presently crossed our bows at a distance of about a mile. We, of course, at once tacked, and, letting the schooner go along clean full, so as to head off the lugger, set our topgallant-sail and small gaff-topsail.

We rapidly neared each other, the *Dolphin* gradually edging away as the lugger fore-reached upon us, until only half a mile of water divided the two craft. Then we saw that her people were busy with the mysterious object between her masts, and presently, sure enough, a long nine-pounder, mounted upon a pivot, stood revealed. Five minutes later they tried a shot at us

from this same piece—the ball from which struck the water some five fathoms astern of us,—and at the same time hoisted the French tricolour. We responded by running our ensign up to the gaff, but reserved our fire for a while, the skipper having as yet had no opportunity of finding out our lads' capabilities with the guns. At length, however, having edged up to within a quarter of a mile of the lugger, and having conclusively demonstrated our superiority of sailing, Captain Winter gave orders that our larboard broadside should be carefully levelled and trained upon the lugger's mainmast; and while this was being done she fired her starboard broadside at us, one of the shot from which passed through our mainsail, while another struck our fore-topmast about a foot above the topsail-halliard sheave-hole, bringing down the upper part of the spar and the topgallant-sail.

The Frenchmen's cheers at this success were still floating down to us, when, having personally supervised the levelling and training of our guns, I gave the order to fire. Sharp at the word, our broadside rang out; and as the smoke blew over us and away to leeward the lugger's mainmast was seen to suddenly double up, as it were, in the middle, the upper portion toppling over to leeward and carrying the sail with it into the water, while the foresail began to flap furiously in the wind, the sheet having been shot away.

"Hurrah, men! capitally done!" shouted the skipper; "you have her now," as the lugger, under her mizzen only, shot up into the wind, plunging heavily. "Ready about! and stand by to rake her with your starboard broadside as we cross her stern. Helm's a-lee! Load your port guns again as smartly as you please, my lads. Topsail haul! Stand by, the starboard battery, and give it her as your guns are brought to bear! Away aloft there, a couple of hands, and clear the wreck of the topgallant-mast!"

The *Dolphin*, tacking as fast as the men could haul round the yards, without losing headway for an instant, went round like a top, and in less than half a minute was crossing the lugger's stern. There was tremendous confusion on board, her crew, to the number of some thirty or forty, rushing about her decks,—as we could now plainly see,—apparently undecided what to do next. At the proper moment our starboard broadside was fired, and the great white, jagged patch that instantly afterwards appeared in the lugger's transom showed that pretty nearly, if not quite all, the shot had taken effect.

"Well aimed, men!" cried the skipper in an ecstasy of delight. "That is the way to bring them to their senses. Ready about

again! And stand by to give them your port broadside. Helm's a-lee!"

Round swept the *Dolphin* again, and presently we were once more crossing the stern of the lugger, the confusion on board being, as it seemed, greater than ever. We were by this time within a quarter of a mile of our antagonist, and again our broadside, discharged at precisely the right moment, told with terrible effect on board the lugger, not only raking her from stem to stern, but also bringing down her fore and mizzen-masts. And all this time they had not replied to our fire with a single gun.

Standing on for a distance of about a cable's length, the *Dolphin* again tacked, this time fetching far enough to windward to have enabled us to cross the lugger's bows had we desired to do so. Instead of that, however, Captain Winter gave orders to keep away and pass close under her stern, the starboard broadside being all ready to pour into her if need were. Captain Winter's orders were, however, not to fire until he gave the word. Reaching along on an easy bowline, we were soon on the lugger's starboard quarter, and within biscuit-toss of the vessel, when the skipper ordered the topsail to be laid aback, and as, with diminished way, we drifted fair athwart the lugger's stern, in a position admirably adapted for raking her from end to end, he sprang into the starboard main rigging, and hailed in French, asking whether they surrendered. A man, who looked like the captain, standing near the deserted wheel, looked at us intently for a few seconds, and then, observing that we were all ready to give him our starboard broadside, answered in the affirmative; whereupon our people, several of whom had a smattering of French, gave three hearty cheers as they dropped the lanyards of their locks to the deck, and laid down their rammers, sponges, and hand-spikes.

"Take the starboard cutter, Mr Bowen, and ten men, and go on board to take possession," said the skipper. "Cut away the wreckage as soon as you have secured the crew below, and then send the boat back with a couple of hands, and be ready to receive a tow-line from us. We shall have to take you in tow, as I see that the Indiaman is now on a wind; and I have no fancy for leaving either her or you to make your way into port unprotected. As soon as you are fast to us, set your men to work to get up jury-masts, if you find that there are any spars aboard suitable for the purpose. There is a fine breeze blowing now, and if we have luck we ought to get into harbour to-night, prizes and all."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered I. "The carpenter had better come with us, had he not? I expect we shall want his help in rigging our jury-masts."

"Yes, certainly," assented the skipper; "take him by all means."

"Thank you, sir," said I as I turned away. "Now then," I continued, "ten of you into the starboard cutter, lads, as quick as you like. And take your cutlasses and pistols with you. Come along, Chips, my man; get your tools, and tumble them into the boat."

Ten minutes later we were on board the lugger, which proved to be the *Belle Jeannette*, of Saint Malo, and a very fine craft she was, as we saw, when we stood upon her broad, roomy deck. She mounted nine guns, eight of them being long sixes, while the ninth was the long nine-pounder between the fore and mainmast. I was astonished to see what havoc our shot had wrought, the deck and bulwarks being broadly streaked and splashed with blood, while each gun had its own little group of two or three killed and wounded lying about it. All three of her masts had been shot away, as already stated; and, in addition to this, her stern transom was regularly torn to pieces, one of the jagged and splintered holes being quite large enough for me to have passed through it had I been so minded. Three spokes of the wheel had been shot away, and it was a wonder to me, as I marked the path of our shot along the torn and splintered deck, that the whole concern had not been destroyed. The companion was badly damaged and started; and as for the cabin skylight, there was very little of it left.

The crew—the few of them who could still stand, that is to say—had thrown down their arms and gone forward on to the forecabin upon hearing their skipper state that he surrendered, and there we found them when we boarded our prize. The skipper himself—a rather fine-looking man, some thirty-five years of age, with piercing black eyes, curly black hair and beard, and large gold ear-rings in his ears—had, of course, remained aft; and when I sprang over the bulwarks, in on deck, he advanced toward me, and handing me his sheathed sword, remarked rather bitterly:

"Accept my sword, monsieur, and with it my congratulations upon your good fortune in having secured two such valuable prizes. The Indiaman herself is not to be despised, but I was a fool not to let her go when I saw that her capture was inevitable. I believe we could have escaped you had we hauled our wind when we first made you out; but, as it is, I have lost

not only my prize but also my ship and the chest of specie which we took the precaution of removing from the Indiaman last night. You are certain to find it, as it is lying beneath the table in my cabin, so I may as well make a virtue of necessity and tell you of it at once. Perhaps, under the circumstances, monsieur will be generous enough to be content with the treasure, and allow me to retain my lugger, which represents all that I possess in the world?"

"And thus restore to you the power to inflict further injury upon our commerce? I am afraid not, monsieur," answered I. "Had you been a mere harmless trader, it might possibly have been different; but, as it is, the proposal is—pardon me for saying so—preposterous."

"As monsieur pleases, of course. But it will be my ruin," remarked the man gloomily. "With monsieur's permission, then, I will retire to my cabin." And he turned away as though to go below.

"Pardon me, monsieur," said I, hastily interposing between him and the companion; "I am afraid that my duty necessitates my requesting that monsieur will be so obliging as to remain on deck for the present."

"Then take that, curse you!" ejaculated he, whipping a big, ugly knife out of his bosom, and striking savagely at my heart with it. Fortunately the sudden glitter in his eyes warned me, and I succeeded in catching his upraised arm in my left hand, with which I gripped his wrist so strongly that he was perforce obliged to drop the knife to the deck or submit to have his wrist broken. Kicking the weapon overboard, through an open port close at hand, I called to one of my men to clap a lashing round the hands and feet of my antagonist, and then went forward to superintend the securing of the remainder of our prisoners. There were only fourteen of them uninjured, or whose wounds were so slight as to leave them capable of doing any mischief, and these we drove down into the hold, where, finding plenty of irons, we effectually secured them.

By the time that this was done, the wreck of the masts cut away, and the sails—which had been towing overboard—secured, the *Dolphin* was ready to pass a towrope on board us. This we at once took, securing the end to the windlass bitts, when the schooner filled away, with the lugger in tow, and stood after the Indiaman, which was by this time a couple of miles to windward of us, heading to the northward on an easy bowline, on the starboard tack. Russell, the *Dolphin's* surgeon,

came aboard us about the same time as the tow-line, and while he busied himself in attending to the hurts of the Frenchmen, we went to work to rig up a set of jury-masts—suitable spars for which we were lucky enough to find aboard the lugger—and, by dint of hard work, we contrived to get three spars on end,—securely lashed to the stumps of the masts, and well stayed,—by dinner-time, and by four bells that same afternoon we had the lugger under her own canvas once more, when we cast adrift from the *Dolphin*, it being found that, even under jury-masts, the *Belle Jeannette* was quite capable of holding her own with the Indiaman in the moderate weather then prevailing. Long before this, however, I had found an opportunity to go below and have a look at the treasure-chest, which I had found in the position indicated by the French skipper. It was an unexpectedly bulky affair; so much so, indeed, that I thought the safest place for it would be down in the *Dolphin's* run, and there it was soon safely stowed, after I had gone on board the schooner to report to Captain Winter the great value of our prize. It afterwards turned out that this chest contained no less than thirty thousand pounds in specie; so I was right in considering it worth taking care of.

Chapter Four.

Another fight, and another prize.

The weather had been clearing all day, and when, about six bells that afternoon, we made the high land of Portland, the sky was without a cloud, the atmosphere clear and bright, and the sun was shining as brilliantly as though it had been midsummer, quite taking the keen edge off the frosty air. There was not a vessel in sight in any direction, which was rather a relief to us; for, situated as we were then, it would have been difficult to say whether the sight of a friend or of an enemy would have excited the most uneasiness in our breasts. A friend would almost certainly have been a man-o'-war; and although our papers were nominally a protection of our crew against impressment, we were fully aware that, as a matter of fact, they were nothing of the sort, the captains of our men-o'-war impressing almost as freely from a privateer as from an ordinary merchantman. Now, our men were, so far as we had had an opportunity of proving them, first-rate fellows, with scarcely a single exception, we were therefore most anxious not to lose any of them; and were consequently the reverse of desirous to meet with one of our own ships of war. On the other hand, we were

by this time so close in with the English coast that, if we happened to encounter an enemy, it would certainly be a prowling privateer—like ourselves—heavily enough armed and manned to admit of their venturing, without much risk, over to our side of the Channel, on the look-out for homeward-bound British ships. To encounter such a customer as this would mean plenty of hard knocks, without very much profit, and with just the chance of losing one or the other of our prizes. We were, therefore, heartily thankful to find a clear horizon all round us when the fog cleared away. We were destined, however, to have another bout with a Frenchman before long, as will presently appear.

We had made the high land of Portland about half an hour when the sounds of distant firing were faintly borne to our ears; and shortly afterwards two craft, a cutter and a brig—the latter evidently in chase of the former—hove into view, broad on our weather-bow. The firing was not very heavy, it is true, but it was briskly maintained; and as they came sweeping rapidly down toward us it became apparent that the two craft were exchanging shots from their bow and stern-chasers respectively. The cutter was flying the British ensign, while the brig sported the tricolour; and, the two vessels being dead before the wind, the brig carrying studding-sails on both sides, the Frenchman seemed to be getting rather the best of it, overhauling the cutter slowly but surely. As soon as this was seen, the *Dolphin* hove-to and put ten more men on board the *Belle Jeannette*, with orders to me to close with the Indiaman, and to clear for action, both which orders I obeyed without loss of time. And, while doing so, the *Dolphin* and ourselves hoisted British colours, as a hint to the brig that if she dared to meddle with us we were quite ready for her. The cutter and the brig happened to be steering a course that would bring them close aboard of our little squadron, and when the Frenchman saw the colour of our bunting he began at once to shorten sail by taking in his studding-sails, preparatory, as we supposed, to hauling his wind out of so perilous a neighbourhood.

But in supposing thus we were mistaken; the fellow evidently at once hit off our respective characters to a T; he saw that the lugger—under jury-masts and bearing other unmistakable signs of having been very recently in action—was a prize; no doubt judged the Indiaman to be a recapture; and—perhaps believing that, with these two prizes, the schooner would be very short-handed—quickly made up his mind that either of the three would be more valuable than the cutter to him. At all events he shortened sail in a most determined and workmanlike manner,

threw open all his ports, and, slightly shifting his helm, made as though he would slip in between the *Dolphin* and the Indiaman. Captain Winter, however, would not have it so; as the Frenchman luffed, the *Dolphin* edged away, until both vessels were heading well in for the West Bay, athwart the Indiaman's hawse, and running upon lines so rapidly converging that, within ten minutes of the declaration of the Frenchman's intentions, the brig and the schooner were within biscuit-toss of each other. The brig mounted six guns of a side against the *Dolphin's* five; but this disparity was altogether too trifling a matter for our skipper to take any notice of, and accordingly, when the two vessels had neared each other to within about twenty fathoms, the Frenchmen showing signs of an intention to run the schooner on board, Captain Winter poured in his starboard broadside, and at the same time edged away just sufficiently to keep a few fathoms of water between himself and the brig. The broadside was promptly returned, and in another minute the two vessels were at it, hammer and tongs, yard-arm to yard-arm, and running almost dead away before the wind.

Meanwhile, having sent a hand aloft to take a look round, and having thus ascertained that there was nothing else in sight to interfere with us, I came to the conclusion that the Indiaman might very well take care of herself for half an hour or so; and, accordingly, we in the lugger at once bore up to support the schooner. Up to the time of encountering the Frenchman we had been sailing about a quarter of a mile to leeward of the Indiaman, while the *Dolphin* had been jogging along about the same distance to windward of the big ship; our positions, therefore, were such that we in the lugger had only to put up our helm a couple of spokes or so to enable us to converge upon the two combatants, which we did. By the time of our arrival upon the scene the fight was raging so hotly, and both craft were so completely enveloped in smoke that neither party was aware of our presence; I therefore steered so as to just shave clear of the *Dolphin's* stern; and, having done so, our men deliberately fired each of the four long sixes in our larboard broadside slap into the stern of the brig, raking her fore-and-aft. Then, passing out clear of her, we tacked the instant that we had room, and, passing close under her stern again, gave her in like fashion the contents of our starboard broadside. This time the Frenchmen were ready for us, and returned our fire with their two stern-chasers, both shot passing through our mainsail without doing any further damage. Again we tacked; and this time I gave orders to put in a charge of grape on top of each round shot, which we rattled into the stern of the Frenchman at a distance of not more than three or four

fathoms. Our shot must have wrought terrible execution; for after each discharge we could hear the shrieks and groans of the wounded even through the crash of the two other vessels' broadsides. This time they only gave us one gun in exchange for our four, the shot passing in through our port bulwarks and out through the starboard, killing a man on its way. Our shot, however, had killed the brig's helmsman, and almost immediately afterwards the vessel broached-to, her foremast going over the bows as she did so. This was enough for them; they received another broadside from the *Dolphin*, and then, just as we were in stays, preparatory to passing athwart their stern and raking them again, a man ran aft and hauled down their flag, at the same time crying out that they surrendered.

The firing on both sides at once ceased, the smoke drifted away to leeward, and we were able to see around us once more, as well as to note the condition of the combatants after our brief but spirited engagement. The cutter had seized the opportunity to make good her escape, and was now more than two miles to leeward, running before the wind to the westward on her original course. The brig—which proved to be the *Étoile du Nord*, of Dunkirk—had, as already stated, lost her foremast, her bulwarks were riddled with shot-holes, and her rigging badly cut up. The *Dolphin* also had suffered severely from the fire of her antagonist, her starboard bulwarks being almost destroyed, her rigging showing a good many loose ropes'-ends floating in the wind, and her main-boom so severely wounded that it parted in two when her helm was put down to bring her to the wind and heave her to. As for us, the damage that we had received from the brig's fire was so trifling as to be not worth mentioning.

I knew, of course, that after so determined a fight the services of our surgeon would be in urgent request on board both the principal combatants; so, as he was aboard the lugger, I ran down close under the *Dolphin's* lee and, having hove-to, lowered a boat and put the medico on board the schooner, going with him myself to see whether I could be of any service. The deck of the schooner bore eloquent testimony to the sharpness of the recent conflict, several dead and wounded men lying about the guns in little pools of blood, while the torn and splintered woodwork that met one's view on every side was grimly suggestive of the pandemonium that had raged there a few minutes previously. Captain Winter was one of the wounded, a splinter having torn a large piece of skin from his forehead, laying bare the skull over his right eye; but the gallant old fellow had replaced the skin as well as he could, lashed up the wound with his silk neckerchief, using his pocket

handkerchief under it as a pad, and was attending to his duty as coolly as though he had escaped untouched. He instructed me to go on board the brig with ten men, to take possession, leaving the carpenter in charge of the lugger, and at the same time signalled the Indiaman—which had hove-to some two miles to windward—to close.

The new prize was, as may be supposed, terribly knocked about; out of a crew of eighty-six men and boys she had no less than nineteen killed—the captain among them—and forty-three wounded; while, in addition to the damage which had been noticeable before going on board her, I found that two of her guns had been dismounted, most probably by the lugger's raking broadsides. Fortunately, her hull was quite uninjured, the whole of the damage done being to the upper works. Our first task was to clear away the wreck of the foremast, the skipper hailing me soon after I had boarded to say that he intended the Indiaman to take us in tow. The wreck was soon cut away, and just as it was falling dark we got our tow-line aboard the Indiaman, and proceeded, the uninjured Frenchmen having meanwhile requested permission to attend to their wounded fellow-prisoners and make them comfortable below.

More or less disabled as we all were, with the exception of the Indiaman, it took us until past midnight to reach Weymouth roadstead, where we anchored for the night, without communicating with the shore; no one in the town, therefore, was aware of our quick return to port, and our brilliant success, until the following morning; and as for Mr Peter White, our owner, the first intimation that he had of the affair was while he was dressing; when his servant knocked at his door to say that Captain Winter had returned with three prizes, and was waiting below to see him. The old gentleman, I was afterwards told, was so excited at the good news that he would not wait to dress, but descended to the parlour, where the skipper awaited him, in his dressing-gown. The old boy was almost overwhelmed at the news of his good fortune; insisted that Captain Winter should stay to breakfast with him; and afterwards, despite the cold weather, came off to the roadstead and visited each of the prizes in turn. It was as well, perhaps, that he did so, as there was a considerable amount of business to be transacted in connection with the recapture of the *Hoogly*, the captain of which was anxious to resume his voyage up channel as soon as possible. This important matter was arranged by noon; and about two o'clock, the wind having hauled round from the southward, the Indiaman weighed and proceeded, the passengers on board having meanwhile

subscribed a purse of two hundred and thirty guineas for the officers and crew of the *Dolphin*, in recognition of what they were complimentary enough to term our "gallantry" in the recapture of the ship. This nice little sum was, however, only the first instalment of what was to come; there was the salvage of the ship to follow: and over and above that I may mention that the underwriters voted a sum of five hundred guineas to us; while the Patriotic Fund Committee awarded the skipper a sword of the value of one hundred guineas, and to me a sword of half that value, for our fight with and capture of the two privateers, poor Lovell being left out in the cold in consequence of his having been prize-master of the *Hoogly*, and having therefore taken no part in either of the engagements. He got his reward, however, in another way; for the *Étoile du Nord* turned out to be such a very fine vessel, quite new and wonderfully fast, that Mr White purchased her on his own account, rechristening her the *North Star*, and put Lovell in command. He was fairly successful in her, I afterwards heard, but not nearly to such an extent as he ought to have been with so fine a vessel under him. He declared that luck was always against him. As for me, Mr White was so pleased with the report of my conduct which Captain Winter had given him that, as soon as ever the purchase of the *Étoile du Nord* had been effected, and Lovell provided for, he offered me the berth of chief mate of the *Dolphin*, which berth I promptly and thankfully accepted. As for the *Belle Jeannette*, she, too, was sold, fetching a very good price, and before we left port again we had divided our prize-money, my share of which amounted to the very respectable sum of two thousand six hundred and odd pounds.

The *Dolphin* had received so severe a mauling in her fight with the French privateer brig that, although the utmost despatch was used in repairing and refitting her, it was not until the 24th of December that she was again ready for sea, by which time news had reached us of the declaration of war by Spain against Great Britain. This last circumstance, of course, threw all hands of us into a fever of impatience to get to sea again, in order that we might have an early opportunity of picking up a rich Spanish prize; but when Christmas-eve arrived, finding us still in harbour, our owner was generous enough to say that we might, if we pleased, defer our sailing until the day after Christmas-day, in order that the crew might have the opportunity to spend Christmas at home, which opportunity we thankfully made the most of. But all hands were on board by noon of the 26th, when we cast off and stood out of the harbour once more before a fresh south-westerly breeze, the day being, for a wonder—with the wind in a wet quarter—brilliantly fine, and as mild as a day

in early autumn; a circumstance which most of our lads were willing to accept as the omen of a prosperous cruise.

Captain Winter's object was to reach the French coast as soon as possible, and then to work along it to the westward, right round to the Spanish coast, and thence as far as Gibraltar, and perhaps into the Mediterranean, hoping that somewhere on the way we might pick up something worth having, or at least obtain information relating to a homeward or outward-bound convoy; upon clearing Portland, therefore, we stood across the Channel, on a taut bowline, on the starboard tack, making Cape de la Hague, well on our lee bow, next morning at daybreak. We then shortened sail to our fore-and-aft canvas only, and, taking in our gaff-topsail, held on as we were going, with the French coast close aboard, to leeward, until we reached Granville, when, having seen nothing worthy of our attention, we tacked to the westward, and eventually found ourselves off Cape Frehel, the easternmost extremity of Saint Brieuc Bay. This was our third day out; we had seen nothing, and the men, who appeared to think, from our past experience, that we ought to take at least one prize every day, were beginning to grumble at our ill-luck. Great, therefore, was their enthusiasm when, on the following day,—the breeze being fresh at about north-north-west, and the time about five bells in the forenoon watch,—a large ship was seen to emerge from behind Chien Point, then about eight miles distant, a couple of points on our lee bow. She was coming along under larboard studding-sails. It was my watch on deck, and upon the ship being reported to me I took the glass, and at once went up to the fore-cross-trees to get a better look at her. So far as I could make out she was full-rigged; she floated very deep in the water; and the exceeding whiteness of her sails caused me to suspect that she was homeward-bound from a long voyage. She had somewhat the look of a Dutchman, to my eye, and if so she would probably afford very respectable pickings to a crew of hard-working privateersmen like ourselves. When first seen she was steering a course that would lead her about mid-way between the islands of Jersey and Guernsey; but before I returned to the deck it seemed to me that she had hauled up a point or two, and had braced her yards correspondingly further forward. Our game, of course, was to get between her and the land, if possible, before declaring ourselves, so that, if she happened to be what I suspected, she might be prevented from running in and taking shelter under the guns of one of the numerous batteries which the French had thrown up all along the coast, to cut her out from which might involve us in a heavy loss of men. I therefore gave no order to make sail, or to alter our course,

but at once went down below to the skipper, who was lying down, his wounded head still troubling him a good deal, and reported the stranger to him. He immediately followed me on deck at the news, and took a good long look at the ship through the telescope; and while he was doing so she took in her studding-sails and hauled her wind.

"Ah!" remarked the skipper; "they have made us out, and evidently don't quite like our looks. I suppose her captain thinks that, having hauled his wind, we shall now make sail in chase of him if we happen to be an enemy. But I know a trick worth two of that. You did quite right, Mr Bowen, not to shift your helm. Let him stand on another three miles as he is going, and then we will show him who and what we are. Just so; there goes his bunting—Dutch, as you thought. He is beginning to feel a little anxious. Perhaps it would ease his mind a bit if you were to run the tricolour up to our gaff-end, Mr Bowen."

I did so, and we kept it flying for the next half-hour, by which time the Dutchman had been brought well out on our weather beam, about six miles distant, and his retreat cut off. We then hauled down the French flag and made sail, still, however, holding on upon the same tack. By the time that we had got our topsail, topgallant-sail, flying-jib, and small gaff-topsail set the stranger was about two points abaft our weather beam, and we at once tacked in chase. This was the signal for an immediate display of confusion on board the Dutchman; which ship immediately set her royals and flying-jib, and, when she found that that would not do, bearing away sufficiently to permit of her setting all her larboard studding-sails again. Of course, as soon as she bore away we bore away too, steering such a course as would enable us to gradually converge upon her.

But we had hardly been in chase half an hour when another large ship appeared in sight ahead, steering toward us; and, approaching each other rapidly, as we were, another quarter of an hour sufficed us to discover that she was a frigate, and undoubtedly French. We stood on, however, a few minutes longer, trying to devise some scheme for slipping past her without being brought to, but it evidently would not do; her people suspected us, and clearly intended to have a nearer look at us if they could; so, as she was altogether too big a craft for us to tackle, we were reluctantly compelled to abandon the chase, and heave about to ensure our own escape. And now it became our turn to play the part of the pursued; for as we went in stays the frigate fired a gun, to ascertain whether we were within range, most probably, hoisted her ensign, and made all

sail in chase. The shot—a twelve-pounder, we judged it to be by the sound of the gun—fell short; yet at the same time it came near enough to satisfy us that we had not turned tail a moment too soon.

Captain Winter at once jammed the schooner close upon a wind, the vessel heading up about west-north-west for the chops of the Channel, in the hope of both out-weathering and out-sailing the frigate. But the wind had shown a disposition to freshen all day, and was by this time piping up so spitefully that we had been obliged to furl our topgallant-sail and haul down our flying-jib as soon as we hauled our wind; moreover there was a nasty, short jump of a sea on, into which the *Dolphin* plunged to her knight-heads every time. The weather was, therefore, all in the frigate's favour, and very soon, to our extreme annoyance, we discovered that the Frenchman was slowly but surely gaining upon us; for when the frigate had been in chase about half an hour, she fired another gun, the shot from which reached within twenty fathoms of us, and it was capitally aimed, too.

"We must get the topgallant-sail and flying-jib on her again, Mr Bowen, and shift our small gaff-topsail for the big one. This will never do; we shall be within range in another half-hour; and then, if that fellow happens to wing us, we shall be done for!"

"The sticks will never bear it, sir," answered I. "Look at our topmasts now; they are bending like fishing-rods as it is; and unless we rig the preventers pretty quickly we shall lose them, in my opinion."

"Then get up your preventers at once, my dear fellow," answered the skipper; "and be as smart as you please about the job. One thing is quite certain, and that is that unless we can drive the schooner a little faster we shall be nabbed!"

"Perhaps, sir," said I, "if we were to keep the schooner away about half a point she would go along more freely. We are looking a good point higher than the frigate at present, but we are hugging the wind so closely that we have no life in us, and are losing as much as we gain."

The skipper looked at the frigate astern, then up at the weather leech of our own topsail, which was lifting at every plunge of the schooner.

"Perhaps you are right, George," said he. "At all events your suggestion is worth trying. So, my man," to the helmsman, at

the same time peering into the binnacle, "keep her away to west-by-north; nothing higher."

"West-and-by-north, and nothin' higher, sir," answered the man, easing his weather helm a couple of spokes as I turned away to see to the preventer back-stays being rigged.

Chapter Five.

The French frigate.

Our preventer back-stays—which, for the benefit of the uninitiated, I may explain, were simply extra ropes intended to take a portion of the strain and so relieve the ordinary back-stays whenever it became necessary to carry a very heavy press of canvas—were already cut and fitted; all that we had to do, therefore, was to send their upper ends aloft and attach them to their respective spars by shackling the eye to a stout iron collar on the spar, fitted especially for the purpose, set up the lower ends by means of runners to ring-bolts in the stanchions, and the thing was done. Five minutes sufficed for this job, and we then reset our topgallant-sail and flying-jib, and shifted our gaff-topsail. The effect soon became apparent; for a few minutes after we had concluded our work the frigate fired another gun, the shot from which only reached to within about thirty fathoms of us. I was inclined to attribute this result, however, quite as much to our having eased the schooner away a trifle as to the extra canvas that we had packed upon her. I believed we should have done quite as well, if not better, without it; for the poor little craft seemed pressed down and buried by the enormous leverage of the wind upon her sails. She was heeling over so much that it was difficult to maintain one's footing upon the steeply inclined deck; the lee scuppers were all afloat, and at every lee roll the white, yeasty seething from her lee bow brimmed to the level of her rail, sometimes even toppling in over it. She was a magnificent sea-boat; but we were now driving her so unmercifully that at every plunge into the hollow of a sea she buried her sharp nose completely, taking green water in over both the lee and the weather-bow by tons at a time, so that it became necessary to close the fore-scuttle to prevent the water from going below. As for the spray, it flew over us in clouds, coming right aft, and wetting our mainsail as high up as the second reef-band.

Another gun from the frigate served to conclusively demonstrate that we were at least holding our own; but our topmasts were bending like fishing-rods, and at every savage plunge of the schooner I quite expected to see one or both of them go over the side. The skipper, too, was very uneasy, as I could see by the anxious glances that he continually flung aloft. At length, when the frigate had fired yet another gun, the shot from which fell at about the same distance astern of us as the preceding one had done, he turned to me and said:

"This is all very well, George, as far as it goes; and if the wind would only drop a little we might snap our fingers at that fellow astern; but I don't at all like the way that those topmasts are whipping about, up there. If so much as a rope-yarn parts we shall lose them, as sure as fate; and then we may bear up for a French prison as soon as we please. The frigate keeps popping away at us, in the hope, I suppose, that a lucky shot may wing us; and I don't see why we shouldn't return the compliment. We are just out of reach of her twelve-pounders, but I think our long eighteen ought to be capable of pitching a shot aboard her. Just bowse it up to wind'ard as far as it will go, and let us see what it will do."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered I. "The gun ought to reach her; and if we can but wing her, though ever so slightly, we may scrape clear after all. Lay aft, here, some of you, and get the tarpaulin off this Long Tom, and pass the word for the gunner."

We soon got the gun into position, and the captain of it—a man who had seen a great deal of service on board a man-o'-war, from which he had deserted just before joining the *Dolphin*—tried a shot at the frigate. The gun was splendidly aimed, but it was fired just a second too late, as the schooner's stern was dipping; the result was that the shot, which flew straight for the frigate, struck the water some distance ahead of her.

"Very good, Mason, for a first attempt!" remarked the skipper approvingly. "Try again, my lad."

The gun was sponged, loaded, and again fired, and this time the shot hulled the frigate fair and square, striking her about a foot below the larboard hawse-pipe.

"Now," remarked the skipper, "try her again, my fine fellow. You ought to do something worth the powder this time."

The words were hardly spoken when the frigate bore almost square up for a moment, and let fly her whole weather

broadside at us; but every one of the shot fell short. The moment that she had fired she luffed up into our wake once more.

Again Mason pointed the long gun and fired, but this time—perhaps because he was too careful—the shot flew wide, striking the water some distance to leeward and, as we all thought, astern of the frigate.

“Keep cool, Mason, keep cool, my man,” warned the skipper. “That shot was well meant, and shows that you have got the range to a nicety; but you were in too much of a hurry. Try again.”

Mason mopped his forehead with his handkerchief, although the wind was piercingly cold; the gun was reloaded, and then Mason pointed and levelled it with the utmost care. When this was done, taking the lanyard in his hand he stepped back to the utmost length of the line, and with arm outstretched, stood for more than a minute squinting along the sights of the gun. Suddenly he pulled the lanyard, the gun belched forth a torrent of flame and smoke, and, as I stood looking at the frigate through my own telescope, I saw a small round hole appear in the foot of the fore-topgallant-sail, another moment and the topgallant-mast doubled over and went, hanging down by its rigging, under the lee of the topsail, with the topgallant-sail and royal attached.

“Hurrah!” shouted I, in an ecstasy of delight; “winged her, by all that is fortunate!”

The men heartily echoed my cheer; one or two of them playfully patting Mason on the shoulder, by way of encouragement.

“A most excellent shot!” remarked the skipper. “I owe you a glass of grog for that, Mason; and you shall have it, my lad, but by and by, not now; you must keep your head perfectly clear until we have done with that gun. Try her again!”

They were certainly a very smart set of fellows aboard the Frenchman; for no sooner had the topgallant-mast fallen than the hands were in her rigging on their way aloft to clear away the wreck.

Again Mason levelled the gun, taking a long and careful aim as before; and this time the shot struck the sill of the frigate’s lee bridle port, entering the port, and no doubt raking the deck for a considerable portion of its length. That it did enough damage

to greatly exasperate the French captain seemed almost certain, for presently he bore away again and treated us to another broadside, the shot of which fell so far astern that it looked as though we were now creeping away from her.

Mason now seemed to have got his hand in, for his next shot hit the frigate's bowsprit-end as fair as though he had specially aimed at it, knocking the cap to pieces, and causing the jib-booms to go over to leeward. This completely disabled the frigate, so far as chasing to windward was concerned, as with the loss of her jib-booms she also lost the use of her jibs; the pressure of her after-sail at once throwing her up into the wind until she was all aback. They at once went to work to take in all the sail upon her mizzen-mast, and presently boxed her off again; but her captain knew that to think of catching us now was out of the question, and presently he wore round and hauled up to the northward and eastward, on an easy bowline; his people swarming on the forecastle as they busied themselves in securing the jibs.

Our lads gave three rousing cheers as they saw the frigate bear up; but it appeared that we had not quite done with her yet, for as the men ceased cheering, the skipper very quietly remarked:

"Now it is our turn! That fellow has given us some anxiety; and, now that we have the opportunity, we will return the compliment. I mean to teach him that he cannot bully us poor, hard-working privateersmen with impunity. Take in your topgallant-sail, flying-jib, and gaff-topsail, Mr Bowen, and then stand by to 'bout ship."

Our men responded to this with a cheer of rapturous delight. We had had an opportunity to take a good look at the frigate as she wore round, and we had made her out to be a vessel of thirty-six guns. The audacity of the idea of the *Dolphin* actually chasing such a ship exactly suited the taste of our people; it was a stupendous practical joke to them, and they entered into it with all the glee and spirit of so many overgrown school-boys. Sail was quickly shortened, and we then hove about and steered after the Frenchman.

The first thing to be done was to get the long gun over to windward. This was soon accomplished; and then Mason went to work once more. His first and second shots were misses; but the third one plumped slap in through the frigate's cabin windows. The next shot struck the gig that was hanging at the frigate's weather quarter, tearing her bottom out; and the next passed through her main-topsail. After this came four misses in

succession, to the unspeakable disgust of all hands, who chaffed poor Mason so unmercifully that he almost lost his temper over it. The skipper thought the opportunity a good one to serve out a glass of grog to the gun's crew, which had the effect of restoring harmony; and presently Long Tom began to speak again. The shot struck fair upon the frigate's stern; and almost instantly she flew up into the wind, with all the appearance of something having gone wrong with her steering-gear. She remained head to wind for so long a time that at length the skipper caused our own helm to be put down and the topsail laid to the mast lest we should stand on too far and get within range of her guns. And we were not a moment too soon; for as we rounded-to she fired the whole of her larboard broadside at us, the shot making the water spout all round us, and one of them actually striking our hull; it was, however, so far spent that it did no damage.

Lying almost broadside-on to us, as the frigate now was, she presented a very pretty mark for target practice; and our long eighteen was brought to bear upon her most effectively. Shot after shot we gave her, as fast as the men could load, and almost every one of them struck her somewhere. Mason's blood was now thoroughly up; he was making a reputation as a crack shot, and he knew it. I saw, by the increasing care with which he every time sighted his piece, that he was striving to do something specially good; and presently he did it. Taking an unusually long and careful aim he at length gave a smart tug to the lanyard, and immediately sprang aside to watch the result.

"Did it, by the great horn spoon!" shouted he delightedly; and even as he spoke we saw the white splinters fly from the frigate's mainmast-head; the topmast swayed aft, tottered for a moment, and came down by the run!

The delight of our men—every soul of whom was by this time on deck—was a sight to see! They cheered shouted, laughed, patted Mason on the back, and were in the midst of a variety of ludicrous antics, expressive of supreme gratification, when another broadside rattled out from the frigate, and this time the shot went humming close over our heads, drilling half a dozen holes in our canvas, and showing us that we had drifted within range of her guns. We immediately filled on the schooner, and hauled off to a respectful distance; for we had no fancy for being reduced to the same plight as the Frenchman. But the moment that we considered ourselves safe from her guns we again hove-to, and resumed our attentions with the long gun.

They were now in a very pretty mess on board the frigate; but they managed at length to box her off again; and this time they bore up for the land; making as though they would run in behind the Saint Riom islands. We immediately bore up in chase, and, running parallel with her, and taking care to keep just beyond the range of her broadside, plied her with the long gun again so effectively that some twenty minutes afterwards her foremast went over the bows, and, broaching-to once more, she lay completely at our mercy.

"There," exclaimed the skipper, in a tone of great gratification, "that will do with the gun. We have done enough for honour, I think, and have given him a thorough good licking, so we may as well be off. We cannot take him," he continued, in answer to my exclamation of astonishment at this decision on his part; "he is altogether too big a fish for our net. If he were to haul down his colours he would rehoist them directly that, in running down to take possession of him, he had got us fairly within the range of his broadside; and at close quarters he would simply sink us in ten minutes. No; I am sorry, but I can see nothing for it but to leave him—unless you have any plan to suggest, Mr Bowen."

"I am really very much afraid that what you say is only too true, sir," answered I mournfully. "I suppose we could compel him to haul down his colours, by pegging away at him with our long gun, as he is fairly in our power now; but, naturally, he would seize any opportunity that might present itself to effect a recapture. At the same time it seems a thousand pities to leave him now that we have given him such a terrible mauling. Why not keep pounding away at him a little longer? Perhaps we may yet hit upon some plan by which to secure possession; and only think of what a feather it would be in our caps if we could but capture a fine frigate like that, and take her into port!"

"That is very true," answered the skipper, and I could see that my reference to the credit of such an exploit had touched him in a weak spot. "Well," he continued, "we will not give up yet awhile. The frigate is unmanageable at present, and will continue so until they can get some sort of a jury-mast rigged for'ard; so we will fill on the schooner, and make a stretch to windward until we can get into a raking position, then drop down upon mounseer, and see what we can do with him. But it is a risky business; a lucky shot may cripple us at any moment, and we should then be done for. However, 'nothing venture, nothing have!' so fill your topsail, Mr Bowen, and we will make a bid for glory, although that is not our business."

This decision was received with enthusiasm by the men, who at once went to work with hearty good-will to execute the orders that the skipper now rapidly issued. We filled upon the schooner, and reached away to the northward and eastward on an easy bowline, keeping just beyond reach of the frigate's guns, and making play diligently all the time with our own long eighteen, aiming for the stump of the foremast, so as to embarrass the Frenchmen as much as possible in any attempt that they might make to rig up a jury spar. But the French captain was game to the backbone, and, helpless as he was to retaliate upon us, omitted no effort to extricate himself from the difficulties by which he was surrounded. What would he not have given, at that moment, for a single gun powerful enough to have reached us? As it was, he fired at us at frequent intervals, for the apparent purpose of ascertaining whether we had inadvertently ventured within range; and I noticed that every shot fell further away from us. I could not at first comprehend this, as our own shot continued to strike every time; but at length I thought I had hit upon an explanation of the mystery, which I mentioned to Captain Winter. My belief was that the French captain was gradually reducing his charges of powder, in the hope that, by so doing, he would tempt us to draw nearer, under the impression that we were well out of range, when, perhaps, by a well-directed broadside, with a full powder charge, he might succeed in unrigging us; when our capture, by means of his boats, would be an easy matter. We were not, however, to be so easily tempted.

At length, by dint of great exertion, and probably at the cost of many men, the Frenchmen succeeded in cutting adrift the wreck of their foremast; when, by furling all the canvas upon their mizzen-mast, they managed to once more get the frigate before the wind and heading in for the land. And now came our opportunity, for we were by this time dead to windward of our antagonist; and no sooner was she before the wind than we, too, kept away, gradually closing with her, and keeping our long gun playing upon her until there was a hole in her stern big enough to have driven a coach through. As soon as we were near enough she opened fire upon us with her two stern-chasers; and at the very first fire both shots came in through our bows and raked us fore and aft, killing one man and wounding three others with the splinters that were sent flying about our ears. Finding that we had approached her too closely, we immediately hauled our wind, and began to sail to-and-fro athwart her stern, keeping up a brisk fire upon her with our long gun, and raking her at every shot. This went on for about a quarter of an hour, during which she repeatedly returned our

fire, but without effect; and then a lucky shot from us cut her main-yard in two in the slings, and she was once more helpless, broaching-to, and lying with her bows well up to the wind. This reduced to nothing her hopes of escape by running in under the land and anchoring within the shelter of the guns of a battery; and after receiving three or four more shots from us, she actually hauled down her colours and surrendered, to the unmitigated delight of our lads, who cheered themselves hoarse over their victory.

And now came the delicate question of taking possession. We fully realised that it was only the superior power of our long eighteen that had enabled us to accomplish the astonishing feat of compelling a frigate of thirty-six guns to haul down her colours to a schooner mounting less than a third of that armament; and we felt that our only chance of securing peaceable possession of our prize, now that she had surrendered, was to maintain the advantage conferred upon us by this superiority. It was, therefore, at length decided that I should go on board the prize with forty men to take possession, while the schooner remained hove-to out of range of the frigate's guns, but near enough to open fire again with the long gun, should we meet with any difficulty from the French crew. My instructions were, to go on board, secure the crew, and then fire three blank cartridges in quick succession as a signal that I had obtained possession; upon which the schooner was to close and render me all possible assistance.

Chapter Six.

We are compelled to abandon our prey.

We lowered our two cutters and the gig, and then, picking out my forty men, and arming them with a cutlass and a brace of pistols apiece, I shoved off to take possession of our prize. There was a rather nasty, short, choppy sea running; but, fortunately, we were to windward, and only had to run down before it. As we neared the frigate it became increasingly apparent to us that she was an exceedingly fine and handsome ship; her tonnage, according to my estimate, being not far short of nine hundred tons. She had been knocked about a good deal more severely than I had anticipated; and as we drew still nearer I was astonished to perceive that some of her scuppers were running blood.

It took us about half an hour to pull down to her; and when we went alongside, under her lee, we met with no opposition whatever in boarding, somewhat to my surprise, I must confess, for, as a matter of fact, I did not believe that they had really surrendered, the hauling down of their colours being, in my opinion, only a ruse to get us within reach of their guns. In this, however, as it turned out, I was mistaken, and did the commanding officer an injustice.

We clambered up the frigate's lofty side without let or hindrance; and when I sprang, sword in hand, down upon her deck, I was met by a mere lad, his beardless face deadly pale, his head bound up in a blood-sodden bandage, and his right arm hanging helpless—and broken—by his side. With his left hand he tendered to me his sword, in silence, and then, turning away, burst into tears.

And as I looked around me I could well understand the cause of the poor young fellow's emotion. It was not only that this fine, handsome ship—brand-new, as it turned out, and only commissioned a few days previously—was a perfect wreck aloft, but the dead and wounded were lying about her decks, especially in the vicinity of the stump of the foremast, in heaps. Her bulwarks were shot through and through; her wheel was smashed to pieces; and there were long scorings fore-and-aft her decks, showing the paths that our eighteen-pound shot had ploughed up in their destructive passage. But even this was not the worst of it; for when I turned to the young officer and tried to soothe him by the utterance of some platitude having reference to "the fortune of war", he informed me that, although he had that morning been the ship's junior lieutenant, he was now the senior surviving officer; the captain and the other lieutenants being among the killed.

"And to think," he ejaculated bitterly, "that we should have been compelled to strike to such an insignificant craft as that!" pointing to the schooner. "But," he added, "you did not fight fair; you never gave us a chance. Had you but once fairly come within range of our guns we would have blown you out of the water!"

"Precisely!" I agreed; "we were well aware of that, monsieur, and, therefore, we preferred to fight you at a respectful distance. And now," I continued, "as I have relieved you of your command, let me beg you to lose no time in going below to the surgeon to get your hurts attended to; I am sure that France can ill afford to lose so brave a man as yourself."

The poor fellow smiled wanly at my clumsy compliment, and with a bow turned away to follow my suggestion; while I went to work to get the prisoners disarmed and secured below. This was managed without difficulty; the French appearing to be too utterly downcast and broken-spirited to dream of resisting us after having hauled down their colours; and I was not surprised at this when I shortly afterwards learned that, out of a crew numbering two hundred and eighty-four, she had lost no less than seven officers and sixty-three men killed, and eighty-eight officers and men wounded. It was astonishing; the more so when I came to reflect that all this loss and damage had been inflicted by one gun! But then it was to be remembered that the unfortunate frigate had been under the fire of that one gun for close upon five hours; the dusk of the short winter's day closing down upon us shortly after we had boarded our prize—the name of which, by the way, was the *Musette*.

Having secured our prisoners, I fired the three blank cartridges agreed upon as a signal, when the *Dolphin* ran down and sent the end of a hawser aboard for the purpose of taking us in tow. She also put very nearly her whole crew aboard, retaining merely enough hands to work her, in order that we might have as much strength as possible for the purpose of rigging up jury-masts.

We had been in tow of the schooner but half an hour when Captain Winter came aboard in a boat to say that we were rather too heavy for him to manage, the breeze having been steadily freshening all day and raising a sea that caused the schooner to strain to an alarming extent with so heavy a craft as the frigate hanging on to her. We therefore went to work to get some sail upon the prize forthwith, and, having routed out a main-staysail, we set it. We found that, in the strong breeze then blowing, even this small amount of canvas was sufficient to place the frigate under command; we therefore cast off from the *Dolphin*, and that craft thereupon shortened sail to her boom-foresail and fore-staysail, so that she might not run away from us. But even under that short canvas she was able to sail round and round us.

During the whole of that night we stood to the northward and eastward; and all night long, too, we were hard at work, watch and watch, getting up jury spars; the result of our labours being that, by daybreak next morning, we had got a very serviceable jury foremast in place, enabling us to set a fore-staysail, and also a main-topsail in place of a foresail. With this head sail we were also enabled to give the frigate her close-reefed mizzen-

topsail and spanker; with which canvas we began to move through the water at quite a respectable pace—that is to say about four knots per hour. This, however, was not all; for the carpenter had been hard at work all through the night preparing a jury fore-topmast and jib-boom; while we had got a spare main-yard swung aloft and slung; by mid-day, therefore, we were enabled to set a fore-topsail, jib, and mainsail, which further increased our speed. By four bells in the afternoon watch the island of Jersey was in sight, broad upon our lee bow, some six miles distant; and at eight bells we tacked ship, being anxious not to draw too close in with the French coast in our then disabled condition.

As the sun went down that night the weather manifested a tendency to improve, and by midnight the wind had softened down to a gentle breeze that barely gave us steerage-way through the water. Finally it died away altogether, and when the sun rose next morning, clear and bright, the *Dolphin* and ourselves were boxing the compass, not half a cable's length apart. This in itself was rather provoking, as we were exceedingly anxious to get our prize into port, and off our hands; but the delay was as nothing compared with the disagreeable circumstance that there were three exceedingly suspicious-looking sails in sight, about ten miles to the westward of us, apparently consorts, for we could see a good deal of signalling going on between them, of which we could make nothing.

They were a ship, a brig, and a large lugger, and the cut of their canvas left us little room to doubt that they were French. Of course it was quite possible that they might all three be perfectly harmless merchantmen, but there was a certain smart, knowing look about them eminently suggestive of the privateersman, and if that was their character there could be no doubt whatever that we should find them very objectionable and dangerous neighbours immediately that a breeze happened to spring up. So little did Captain Winter like their appearance that, immediately after breakfast—the calm seeming likely to continue for some few hours—he ordered his own gig to be lowered, and went away in her to get a nearer look at them. There was not much danger in this course, as the gig was a beautifully light, splendidly modelled, fast-pulling boat, exactly suited for such a service, and not in the least likely to be overtaken by any boat such as either of the three vessels in sight might be expected to carry. I did not, therefore, greatly concern myself with the skipper's movements, but gave my whole attention to the getting of additional jury spars aloft, in

order that, if possible, the frigate might be brought into something like fighting order by the time that the breeze should come.

We were busy pointing a new main-topmast when the boatswain, who was in the top, hailed the deck to say that the lugger and brig had rigged out their sweeps, and were heading in our direction, while the ship had lowered her boats and sent them ahead to tow. I went up into the mizzen-topmast cross-trees, taking my glass with me, and soon discovered that the report was only too correct; for when I reached my perch all three craft were heading straight for us, the lugger churning up the water with her sweeps and coming along at quite a smart pace, the brig following close behind, and the ship, in tow of her own boats, bringing up the rear. This effectually disposed of the theory that they might possibly be merchantmen; they were far too heavily-manned to be anything but privateers or men-o'-war, and it was perfectly clear that they were fully bent upon paying us a visit.

It afterwards appeared that Captain Winter did not suspect this new development until some time after the strangers had got into motion; then, observing that all three vessels kept their heads persistently pointed in our direction, and that he appeared to be nearing them much faster than at first, an inkling of the truth dawned upon him, and he ordered his crew to pull easy, that they might reserve their strength for a spurt in case of need. Nevertheless, he continued to pull toward them until he had arrived within gun-shot of the lugger—the crew of which at once opened fire upon him—when, having ascertained the force of the squadron, he returned with all speed to us, having meanwhile made up his mind how to act.

He discovered that the lugger mounted six six-pounders; the brig showed five ports of a side, but the weight of her metal he could not ascertain, since her guns were run in and her ports closed; and the ship mounted sixteen guns, apparently nine-pounders. Now this was a force altogether too strong for us to cope with, even had we not been hampered with a prize to look after; for, unlike the case of the frigate, the force was distributed among three vessels instead of being concentrated on board of one only; and while Captain Winter was always ready to trust something to the chance of accidents, and to risk a good deal upon the chance that a lucky shot might seriously disable a single antagonist, it became a different matter altogether when there were three craft to contend with. He, therefore, reluctantly came to the conclusion that our prize

must be sacrificed in order to ensure our own safety. He therefore pulled straight to the *Dolphin*, and ordering the whole of her boats to be lowered and manned, sent them alongside the frigate, coming on board himself to superintend the operations upon which he had decided.

His first act was to order the whole of the frigate's boats to be stripped of their oars, rowlocks, and bottom-boards, and when this was done they were lowered, and the prisoners, wounded as well as sound, sent down into them; when, as soon as he had satisfied himself that the whole of the Frenchmen were out of the ship, the frigate's boats were towed about a mile away and cast adrift. Meanwhile, in obedience to instructions, I had collected all the inflammable material that I could lay hands upon, and had set the ship on fire in four places, with the result that when the *Dolphin's* boats returned alongside our prize to take us off, she was well alight, with the smoke pouring in dense clouds up through every opening in the deck. It took us but a short time to leave her, and the moment that we were once more on board the schooner the sweeps were manned and the vessel put upon a northerly course, this direction having been chosen in consequence of the discovery that a light air had sprung up and was coming down from the northward and eastward, which would place us dead to windward of our formidable antagonists by the time that it reached us.

At the moment when the *Dolphin* began to move, the lugger was some seven miles away, bearing due west, the brig being about half a mile astern of her, and the ship perhaps a mile astern of the brig. Very shortly afterwards the flames burst up through the frigate's main hatchway, and half an hour later she was blazing from stem to stern; so that, although we had lost her, there was no chance of her again falling into the hands of the French.

The breeze was a long time in finding its way down to us; so long, indeed, that after waiting a full half-hour, with the cat's-paws playing upon the water within biscuit-toss of us, the helm was ported and the schooner headed straight for the fringe of delicate blue that marked the dividing line where the calm and the wind were contending together for the mastery. This was reached in about a quarter of an hour, when, after a feeble preliminary rustling, our canvas filled, the sweeps were laid in, and we began to move through the water at a speed of some two and a half knots per hour, heading up nearly due north, while the lugger and the brig at the same time kept away, in the hope apparently of intercepting us, and the ship despatched

two of her boats to the rescue of their helpless compatriots adrift in the frigate's boats.

The lugger, which was a very fine and evidently very fast vessel of her class, was making desperate efforts to close with us, with such success that at the end of another half-hour it became evident that, unless the light and fickle breeze freshened somewhat in the interim, another couple of hours would see her within gun-shot of us. This, however, gave us no concern whatever, for we were far more than a match for her alone, and although the brig also was doing her best, we were both drawing away from her so steadily that we of the *Dolphin* quite reckoned upon being able in due time to fight and take the lugger before her consort could come up to her assistance.

Six bells in the forenoon watch had just struck when the frigate blew up with a dull, heavy boom, not nearly so loud as I had expected to hear, but the concussion was terrific, causing the schooner to quiver to her keel, while its effect upon the languid breeze was such as to completely kill it for three or four minutes. At the end of that time it came creeping stealthily along the water again, and about half an hour later it reached the lugger, which immediately laid in her sweeps and hauled close to the wind in pursuit of us. We were at this time under all plain sail, to our royal and flying-jib, creeping along at a speed of about four and a half knots, the lugger being about a point abaft our lee beam and two miles distant from us, but looking up about half a point higher than ourselves, in her eagerness to close with us. By noon it had become apparent that we had the advantage in point of speed, so that it lay with us to make good our escape, or not, as we pleased. We had, however, lost one valuable prize, through the inopportune appearance of the lugger and her consorts, and were by no means disposed to go off empty-handed, if we could help it. We therefore quietly and unostentatiously checked our sheets and weather braces just sufficiently to permit the wind to all but spill out of our canvas, thus deadening our way somewhat; and the men then went to dinner.

Our little ruse had its desired effect, the lugger having closed up to within a mile by the time that the men were ready to turn to again; and as the schooner had long ago been cleared for action, the galley fire was now extinguished, and the crew went to the guns in readiness for the coming struggle. At the same time our helm was eased up a trifle, and we began to edge down upon our antagonist.

Just about this time the brig caught the first of the breeze, and at once crowded sail in chase. It was therefore time for us to set about our work in earnest, if we did not desire to have her to reckon with as well as the lugger. Nevertheless, we still withheld our fire; the skipper being determined not to begin until he could make short work of it.

"Mr Bowen," said he to me, when we were within about half a mile of the lugger, "I want to take that fellow with as little damage as possible to his spars and rigging, because if they happen to be much cut up we may find ourselves so seriously hampered as to have some difficulty in getting away from the other two. Be good enough, therefore, to go round the deck, and direct the men to aim with the utmost care at the ports, so that our shot may sweep her decks and drive her men from their guns, after which it will be an easy matter to run alongside and carry her with a rush. I expect her people are already so tired with their long spell at the sweeps that they will not have much stomach for a hand-to-hand fight. Ha! there she opens fire! So it is time to show our colours."

And he proceeded to bend on and hoist the ensign with his own hands, while I turned away to carry out his instructions.

The single shot that the lugger had fired flew fair between our masts, cutting our lee topsail brace. The damage, however, was repaired in less than five minutes by a hand who sprang aloft and neatly spliced and re-rove the brace. Meanwhile our lads had carefully levelled and pointed their guns, and now only awaited the word to fire. This soon came from the skipper, whereupon the five guns in our larboard broadside rang out together, five neat holes in the lugger's bulwarks testifying to the accuracy with which they had been aimed. The lugger almost instantly replied with her starboard broadside, and again the shot went humming over us, but this time without doing any damage. They probably had no very keen desire to engage us single-handed, but were anxious to cripple us and so give time for the brig to close to their support; but in their anxiety to do this they had pointed their guns so high that the shot had flown over us altogether.

Our lads were quite wide-awake enough to understand the importance of making short work of the lugger. They therefore handled their guns very smartly, giving the enemy two broadsides in exchange for their one, and we were now close enough to observe that the second of these two broadsides had dismounted one of the lugger's guns.

"Hurrah, lads!" exclaimed the skipper; "look alive and load again. If you are smart we shall just have time to give another broadside, and board in the smoke. Stand by, fore and aft, with your grappling-irons, and heave as we touch. I will lead the boarders myself, Mr Bowen; so be good enough to take charge of the ship—"

He was interrupted by another broadside from the lugger, which this time crashed in through the bulwarks, and I immediately felt that I was hurt, a sharp, stinging, burning pain just above my left elbow indicating the locality of the injury. It proved to be a mere trifle, however, a large splinter having been driven into the flesh. I quickly pulled it out, and hurriedly bound up the wound with my pocket handkerchief, and as I was doing so Captain Winter gave the word to the helmsman to "Up helm, and run her aboard!"

"I see that you are hurt, Mr Bowen," said he, turning to me. "Nothing very serious, I hope?"

"A mere scratch, sir, I thank you," replied I. "Nothing worth speaking about."

"So much the better," answered the skipper. "Are you ready, there, with the guns? Then fire as we touch, and then follow me everybody but the sail-trimmers. Fire!"

The two vessels collided with considerably more violence than I had anticipated, so much so, indeed, that the shock sent me reeling to the deck, whereby I just escaped being shot through the head by the volley of musketry with which the Frenchmen greeted our arrival; at the same moment our broadside again crashed through and through the lugger's bulwarks; and with a hearty cheer on our side, and a terrific hullabaloo on the part of the French, our lads leapt aboard the lugger, and, taking no denial, succeeded in clearing her decks after an obstinate fight of about a minute, during which several rather severe hurts were given and received on both sides.

Chapter Seven.

Our attack upon Abervrach Harbour.

The unwounded prisoners were quickly secured below;—the wounded on both sides being as quickly transferred to the

Dolphin, in order that they might the more conveniently be attended to by our worthy surgeon; after which the prize was placed in charge of our second mate—a Portland man named John Comben—and we made sail in company.

The brig was at this time about a mile distant on our lee quarter, while the ship was about a mile and a half distant, just open of the brig's stern. Captain Winter stood looking wistfully at the two vessels for a long time; but at length turned away and said regretfully:

"I am afraid we shall have to be content with what we have got, George. If there was only one of them, and I wouldn't care very much which of them it was, I would tackle her unhesitatingly; but the two of them together are rather too big a mouthful for us. So make sail and let us get back to Weymouth as quickly as we can; if another Frenchman were to heave in sight while those two are so close to us we might find it a hard matter to take care of ourselves, to say nothing of the lugger."

The brig and the ship clung persistently to our skirts the whole of that day, although we gradually drew away from them; but during the night we lost sight of them, and late the next evening we arrived in Weymouth harbour without further adventure.

Our prize—the *Cerf*, of Saint Brieuc—proved to be a very fine vessel, and quite worth the taking; still the prize-money accruing from her capture did not amount to very much, and Captain Winter came to the conclusion that, with so many vessels of our own nationality already swarming in the Channel, that locality could no longer be regarded as a very profitable cruising-ground. He therefore determined, with Mr White's full approval, to prosecute operations further afield; trying the Atlantic first of all, and afterwards—if that did not yield satisfactory results—pushing right across as far as the West Indies. This decision arrived at, we pressed forward our preparations with all speed, and a week later were once more ready for sea.

We sailed early on a Saturday morning with a moderate breeze at west; and, having cleared the Bill of Portland, stretched away for the French coast, close-hauled on the starboard tack, making the land near Abervrach Harbour shortly after mid-day on the following Monday. We stood in to within a mile of the land, and then tacked. We were about ten miles off shore when our look-out reported a large sail on our weather beam, coming

down under studding-sails, and it being my watch on deck I went up on to the topsail yard to have a better look at her.

She was about ten miles dead to windward of us at this time, and was steering a course to take her between us and the land. She was evidently a merchantman of about six hundred tons burden or thereabout, floating pretty deep in the water, and had all the appearance of being French. Having completed my observations, I went down and reported to the skipper, who immediately gave orders to tack ship that we might get a nearer view of her. This was done, and when we got round it was found that the stranger bore broad on our weather-bow. We happened to be under easy sail at the time, and Captain Winter at first decided not to increase our spread of canvas, hoping by this means to impress our neighbour with the belief that we were in nowise concerning ourselves about him. But it would not do; he clearly distrusted us, for we were no sooner round than he edged away toward the land, making for Abervrach harbour; and an hour later we had the mortification of seeing the craft—by this time determinable as a barque—enter the harbour and anchor under the guns of one of the two batteries that guarded its entrance. We hoisted French colours, and steered as though we, too, were about to enter the harbour; but the skipper was altogether too wary to venture inside, so when by observation we had ascertained all that we could about the place without exposing the schooner to the fire of either of the batteries, we tacked and stood off shore again as though working along the coast. This was about six bells in the afternoon watch, and as the breeze was light and the flood-tide against us, we made very little progress, and of that little we wasted as much as we thought we dared without exciting suspicion; our object being to remain in the neighbourhood until after dark, and then attempt a cutting-out expedition.

The harbour was a snug enough place, and excellently adapted for the purpose of sheltering shipping from the attack of an enemy; the entrance being guarded by two six-gun batteries—one on each headland—mounting thirty-two pounders, the combined fire of both batteries effectually commanding the entrance. These two batteries were apparently all that we had to fear; but they were quite enough, nay, more than enough, for they were capable of sinking a much bigger craft than the *Dolphin* in less than ten minutes. It was these batteries, therefore, that we had to reckon with in the first place; and, after talking the matter quietly over in the cabin, it was ultimately decided that, as soon as it was dark enough to conceal our movements, the canvas should be taken off the

schooner, and she should be allowed to drive, under bare poles, along the coast back to the eastward until once more abreast of the harbour entrance, when the anchor was to be let go. Then a sharp look-out was to be kept for the barque, and if there were no signs of her making an attempt to slip out to sea again before two o'clock in the morning, the boats were to be lowered, and the skipper and I, with all the hands that could be spared, were to pull in, surprise the batteries, spike the guns, and then dash aboard the barque and bring her out.

The night happened to be dark, with an overcast sky and a thick drizzle of rain; it was therefore excellently adapted for our purpose, and having arrived within about a mile and a half of the land, the first part of our programme was carried out by furling everything and allowing the schooner to drive up the coast until a deeper blackness in the shadow that indicated the land revealed that we were off the harbour's mouth. Here the anchor was let go; and as every precaution had been taken to prevent any light from showing on board the schooner, we had good reason for hoping that our presence in that particular spot was unsuspected. An anchor watch was set, with instructions to keep a sharp look-out and at once report to the skipper anything of an unusual or suspicious character, when all hands turned in for the purpose of securing as much rest as possible prior to the execution of the important task that we had set ourselves.

Nothing having occurred during the earlier part of the night, all hands were called at four bells in the middle watch, a cup of hot coffee and a biscuit was served out to each man, and then those who were to go away in the boats were told off and armed; after which the skipper made a short speech, explaining the nature of the service upon which we were about to engage, and how it was proposed to execute it, after which the boats were got into the water, and we pulled away with muffled oars for the shore.

It had been arranged that the skipper should tackle the battery on the eastern side of the harbour mouth, while I was to deal with the one on the western headland; and as it was deemed possible that, despite all our efforts to mislead those on shore, our appearance during the afternoon might have awakened a sufficient amount of uneasiness to cause a watch to be set for us, it was further arranged that a landing should be effected, if possible, on the outside beach; since if we were expected, we should almost certainly be looked for somewhere along the more sheltered shore inside the harbour.

Our expedition numbered sixty men, all told—thirty in each division,—and upon shoving off from the schooner the two divisions at once separated, the skipper bearing away to the eastward, while I hauled up for a point about half a mile, as nearly as I could guess, to the westward of the western battery.

The night was even thicker and darker than it had been when we brought the schooner to an anchor off the harbour's mouth; there was a cold, dismal rain persistently falling, and the breeze, having freshened up considerably, was now sweeping over the sea with a dreary, wintry, moaning sound that distinctly accentuated the discomfort of our situation, while it had knocked up a sea that threatened to render our landing a work of very considerable difficulty and danger. This became increasingly apparent as we drew closer in with the land, the roar of the surf upon the rocky beach and the ghostly white gleam and flash of the fringe of breakers exciting within me a feeling of very lively apprehension as to the safety of the boats. We pulled cautiously in to within about fifty fathoms of the beach, and then turned the boats round, bows on to the sea, while we looked anxiously about for a suitable spot at which to beach them, allowing them to drift shoreward meanwhile; but it soon became evident that, if we desired to land outside the harbour's mouth, it would be necessary for us to seek a more favourable spot for the purpose, the surf being so heavy and the shore so thickly cumbered with rocks, just where we were, that any attempt at beaching the boats would only result in their destruction, and possibly the loss of several lives. We therefore hauled off again a short distance, and directed our search somewhat further westward, when, after traversing the line of beach for somewhere about half a mile, we found ourselves in a sort of miniature harbour, about fifteen fathoms wide, formed by a projecting reef of rocks, under the lee of which we forthwith effected a landing without the slightest difficulty. I left two men in each boat, to take care of them and keep them afloat, and then, having satisfied myself as well as I could that our ammunition had been kept dry and in serviceable condition, I led the rest of my party up the steep, slippery face of the low cliffs beyond the beach. A breathless scramble of some three or four minutes carried us to the top; and all that remained was for us to follow the edge of the cliff to the eastward, when we should in due time find ourselves at the battery which was the primary object of our attack.

The result of our procedure amply demonstrated the wisdom of the skipper's arrangements; for when we reached the battery—which we did rather sooner than I had expected—we found it

absolutely unguarded at the rear, the sentinels, three in number, being so posted as to watch the harbour entrance only. Where the rest of the garrison were we could not at the moment discover, but, feeling certain that they were somewhere close at hand, it became necessary to proceed with the utmost caution; I therefore formed up my little band under the shelter and in the deep shadow of a projecting angle, and, enjoining upon them the most absolute silence, entered the battery alone for the purpose of reconnoitring.

I gained the inside without difficulty—the gate having been carelessly left unfastened—and at once found myself in a semicircular court-yard formed by the gun platform of the battery and the sod revetment which surrounded it. The platform was about eight feet high, and was apparently casemated, for immediately in front of me, as I entered, was a door and two windows, through the latter of which streamed into the blackness of the night the feeble rays of a barrack lantern. Pyramidal piles of round shot were stacked here and there about the gravelled court-yard; and upon approaching one of these and passing my hand over the shot, I came to the conclusion that the five guns which I dimly made out as shapeless masses of blackness upon the platform were thirty-two pounders. The three sentries, wrapped in their greatcoats, stood motionless, one in the centre and one at each extremity of the platform, facing to seaward, but I judged from their listless attitudes that they were anything but on the alert. Access to the platform was obtained by two broad flights of stone steps, one at either extremity.

It was the work of but two or three minutes for me to ascertain these particulars, having done which I returned to my men, gave them most careful instructions how to proceed, and then led them into the battery, where, while the main body silently divided and stole round, in the shadow of the platform, to the guard-room door, about which they ranged themselves, I and two others, whom I had especially picked for the purpose, drew off our boots, and, in our stockinged feet, crept, silently as shadows, up on to the gun platform, where each of us crouched behind a gun waiting for a signal which I had arranged to give. I selected as my victim the sentinel who mounted guard in the middle of the platform, because he was the most difficult man to approach, the other two being posted close to the head of the two flights of stone steps, and I knew that by the time that I had reached him my men would be quite ready.

The fellow stood close to the middle gun, on its lee side, and appeared to be sheltering himself as well as he could from the wind and the rain by crouching close to its carriage. His back was toward me. I therefore had no difficulty whatever in approaching him, which I did in a crouching attitude until I was near enough to touch the flapping skirts of his coat. Then, drawing myself up to my full height and taking a deep breath, I coughed loudly as a signal to my two men, at the same instant clapping one hand over the sentinel's mouth and seizing his musket in the other as I drove my knee into the small of his back and bore him irresistibly to the ground.

"Utter no sound if you value your life!" I hissed in his ear, in French; and whether it was that my caution was effective, or that the poor fellow was too utterly surprised and astounded to speak, certain it is that he lay perfectly quiet, with my knee on his breast and my hand clutching his throat, while I carefully laid down the musket and drew a gag and some line from my pocket wherewith to secure him. A subdued scuffling to my right and left, scarcely audible above the rush of the wind and the roar of the breakers on the outside beach, told me that the other two sentinels were being similarly dealt with; but there was no outcry whatever, and in less than five minutes we had all three of them securely gagged, and bound hand and foot.

The next thing was to secure the remainder of the garrison, and this we did without any difficulty, simply flinging open the guard-room door and dashing in, cutlass and pistol in hand, upon the sleeping soldiers, and seizing the muskets that stood neatly ranged in a rack along one of the walls. There was a terrific outcry and jabber among the astonished Frenchmen for a minute or two, with some show of a disposition to resist; but I pointed out to them that there were only thirty of them to twenty-six of us, that we were armed while they were not, and that we were not in the humour to put up with any nonsense whatever; which, with the resolute attitude of our men, had the effect of very speedily reducing them to subjection.

I had brought a hammer and a handful of nails with me, and my next business was to spike the guns. This occupied but a very few minutes, and when it was done I returned to the guard-room with the intention of withdrawing my men. As I glanced round the room, however, I caught sight of a small bunch of keys hanging against the wall, and, thinking that these might possibly belong to the magazine, the spirit of mischief suggested to me the propriety of destroying the battery altogether, instead of merely temporarily disabling it; so I took

down the keys, and, lighting another lantern, of which there were several, I proceeded to investigate.

It was as I had anticipated. The keys were those of the magazine and the store-room, and, entering the former, I soon found that there was an ample stock of powder, in kegs and made up into cartridges, to wreck the entire structure. There was also a coil of slow match, a piece of which I cut off, and, taking it outside, lighted it for the purpose of ascertaining the rate at which it burnt. This was soon done, whereupon I cut off enough to burn for about twenty minutes, opened the kegs of powder, and emptying one of them in a heap in the middle of the floor, buried one end of the slow match in the pile, taking the other end outside. I then returned to the guard-room and marched the prisoners, surrounded by my own men, outside the battery, when, having assured myself that all hands were safe, I informed the Frenchmen that I was about to blow up the battery, and recommended them to run for their lives, at the same time directing my own men to let them go. The Frenchmen needed no second bidding. Away they went down the slope like startled deer, tumbling over each other in their anxiety to escape from the effects of the anticipated explosion, to the great delight and amusement of our people, and in less than a minute they had vanished in the darkness. The Frenchmen thus disposed of, I ordered my own men to make the best of their way down to the boats, there to wait for me, and then re-entered the battery. It had been arranged between the skipper and myself that each of us should, after taking our respective batteries, display a lantern or light of some sort, on the parapet, as a signal to the other. And my first act, therefore, upon returning to the battery, was to light a lantern and place it where it could be seen from the other battery, and at the same time be shielded from the wind and the rain. While doing this I noted with satisfaction that the captain's signal was already displayed; so, comforted with the assurance that both batteries were now rendered harmless, I descended to the court-yard, and, with some difficulty, succeeded in igniting the slow match. I waited only long enough to make quite sure that it was burning all right, and then made a bolt of it for my life, overtaking my men just as they reached the beach. We found the boats all right, and perfectly safe, but the men in charge growing very uneasy, as the tide was rising fast over the reef of rocks that sheltered the little cove in which they were lying, and a very nasty, awkward sea was beginning to roll in, occasioning the boat-keepers a great deal of trouble and anxiety in their endeavours to prevent the boats being stove. "All is well that ends well", however, the boats had thus far escaped, and we

lost no time in tumbling into them and shoving off. Just as we did so a terrific glare lit up the sky for an instant, accompanied by a violent concussion of the rocks upon which some of us were standing, and followed by a deep, thunderous boom. Our battery had blown up, and presently, above the seething roar of the sea and the moaning of the wind, we caught the crashing sound of the falling fragments of masonry and earth, and the thud of the heavy guns dislodged from their resting-places upon the demolished platform.

Meanwhile the wind and the sea had both been steadily increasing until it had grown to be what sailors expressively term "a regularly dirty night", and we were no sooner clear of our sheltering reef of rocks than we were struck by a comber that pretty nearly half-filled the boat that I happened to be in, the other boat, which was astern of us, faring little or no better. The men, however, bent to their oars with a will, and in about ten minutes, by keeping the boats stem-on to the sea, we forced our way out through the broken water and were enabled to head for the harbour, toward which, wet to the skin, and half-dead with the cold of the piercing bitter wind, we made the best of our way. Just inside the harbour entrance, and about mid-channel, we fell in with the skipper's two boats, which had arrived a few minutes earlier, and were lying upon their oars, waiting for us. Thus reunited, the skipper and I briefly exchanged details of the result of our respective efforts, after which we gave way in line abreast for the spot where we expected to find the barque. We pulled for a quarter of an hour but failed to discover her, although the skipper and I were equally confident that we must be close to the spot where we had seen her at anchor. Then, after a brief consultation, it was agreed that the boats should separate and search for her, a pistol-shot from the lucky boat being the signal arranged to notify that the search had been successful. This plan, or rather the first part of it, was at once put into execution, each boat pulling away in a different direction from the others; but although we diligently searched in every likely direction, frequently encountering one or another of the other boats, the barque was nowhere to be found, and, not to needlessly spin out this adventure, it may suffice to say that we fruitlessly hunted all over the harbour until daylight, when it became evident that in some mysterious manner the vessel had contrived to give us the slip and make good her escape. It had probably occurred during the time that the skipper and I had been busy with the batteries; but the most curious part of it all was that Comben, our second mate, left in charge of the schooner, declared that, although he had never relaxed his

vigilance for an instant, from the time of our leaving until our return on board, neither he nor any of the men who shared his watch with him had seen anything whatever of the craft. We thus had an arduous, dangerous, and most trying night's work for nothing; for with the escape of the barque our work upon the batteries became absolutely useless to us. So, in no very good-humour, we all shifted into dry clothing, weighed our anchor, shaping a course to the northward and westward, and then went to breakfast.

Chapter Eight.

We fall in with a convoy.

The next three days were spent in dodging about the chops of the Channel, during which we saw nothing except a few homeward-bound British merchantmen—all of them armed and quite capable of taking care of themselves—and a British line-of-battle ship, by which we were chased for six hours, but which we had little difficulty in escaping by jamming the schooner close upon a wind. The unsophisticated reader may perhaps be inclined to wonder why we should have been chased by one of our own men-o'-war; and why, being chased, we should have taken any trouble to escape from her. The fact, however, was that the *Dolphin* was altogether too rakish-looking a craft to be mistaken for a plodding merchantman, her long, low, beamy hull, taunt, tapering spars, and broad spread of superbly-cut canvas proclaimed her a sea-rover as far as the eye could distinguish her; and, as the ensign carried was at that time but an indifferent guarantee of a vessel's nationality, it was the imperative duty of our men-o'-war, when falling in with such a craft, to make sure, if possible, that she was not an enemy and a danger to our commerce. Our friend the two-decker was therefore quite justified in her endeavour to get alongside us and obtain a sight of our papers; and had we possessed any assurance that her delicate attentions would have ended there, her people would have been quite welcome to come aboard us, and overhaul the schooner and her papers to their heart's content. But, unfortunately, we had no such assurance. There was, at the time of which I am now writing, a very great difficulty in procuring men enough to adequately man our ships of war, and there was therefore no alternative left to the government but to resort to the process of impressment, a process which naval officers were too often apt to adopt with scant discrimination. In their anxiety to secure a full

complement for their ships they deemed themselves justified not only in pressing men ashore, but even in boarding the merchantmen of their own nation upon the high seas and impressing so many men out of them that instances were by no means rare of traders being subsequently lost through being thus made so short-handed that their crews were insufficient in number and strength to successfully battle against bad weather. The crews of vessels furnished with letters of marque were nominally protected from impressment; but we were fully aware that the protection was only nominal, and altogether insufficient; hence it came about that a British privateer was always very much more anxious to escape from a man-o'-war flying the colours of her own country than she was to avoid a ship flying those of the enemy.

And now, to return to my story. On the fourth day after our abortive adventure in Abervrach harbour the wind hauled round from the eastward, and, heartily tired of and disgusted with our ill-luck, we gladly squared away before it to seek a better fortune on the bosom of the broad Atlantic. For a fortnight we stretched away to the southward and westward, when we sighted and passed the lofty heights and precipitous cliffs of Flores and Corvo, in the neighbourhood of which Captain Winter determined to cruise for a week, it being customary for homeward-bound ships from the southward to endeavour to make these islands and so check their reckoning. The wind, meanwhile, had gone round, and was now blowing a very moderate breeze from the southward, with a clear sky, bright sunshine, and a pleasantly mild temperature.

We cruised for eight days off the Azores, sighting only three vessels during the whole of that time; and as they were all British they were of course of no use to us. Then, intensely disappointed at our continued ill-luck, we hauled our wind and, with a freshening breeze from the south-west, stretched away to the westward on the larboard tack, Captain Winter having determined to look for better fortune in the West Indian waters.

For the first two days after quitting the neighbourhood of the Azores we made excellent progress; and then a steadily falling barometer, accompanied by a lowering sky and a rapid increase in the strength of the wind, warned us to prepare for bad weather. Up to this time we had been carrying our topgallant-sail, flying-jib, and small gaff-topsail; but with the steady freshening of the wind, the approach of night, and the threatening aspect of the sky, the skipper deemed it prudent to stow our light canvas and to take down a reef in the mainsail

and topsail. It was well that this precaution was taken; for during the night the wind increased to the strength of a gale, with a very heavy, dangerous sea; and when morning came it found us snugged down to the jib—with the bonnet off,—reefed foresail, and close-reefed mainsail. It was at this time looking very black and wild to windward; the sky all along the southwestern horizon being of a deep slaty, indigo hue, swept by swift-flying streamers of dirty, whitish-grey cloud; while the leaden-grey sea, scourged into a waste of steep, foam-capped ridges and deep, seething, wind-furrowed valleys, had already risen to such a height as to completely becalm our low canvas every time that the schooner settled down into the trough. The time was evidently at hand when it would be necessary for us to heave-to; the schooner was therefore got round upon the starboard tack, with her head to the southward; and, as the barometer was still falling, the hands were set to work to send down the yards and house the topmasts while it was still possible to do so. The task was a dangerous one; but we had plenty of strength, and, the men working with a will, it was accomplished within an hour; and the schooner was then ready, as we hoped, to face the worst that could happen. By noon it was blowing so furiously, and the sea had increased to such an extent, that the skipper determined not to risk the vessel any longer by further attempting to sail her, and she was accordingly hove-to under a close-reefed foresail, when everybody but the officer in charge of the deck, and the man at the wheel, went below.

As the day wore on the weather grew worse, and by nightfall it was blowing a perfect hurricane, the force of the wind being so great that, even under the small rag of a close-reefed foresail, the schooner was bowed down to her water-ways, and her lee scuppers were all afloat. Yet the little craft was making splendid weather of it, riding the mountainous seas as light and dry as a gull, looking well up into the wind, and fore-reaching at the rate of fully three knots in the hour. But it was a dreary and uncomfortable time for us all, the air being so full of scud-water that it was like being exposed to a continuous torrent of driving rain; despite our oil-skins and sou'-westers half an hour on deck was sufficient to secure one a drenching to the skin, while the spray, driven into one's face by the furious sweep of the hurricane, cut and stung like the lash of a whip. The schooner, being but a small craft, too, was extraordinarily lively; leaping and plunging, rolling and pitching to such an extent and with so quick a motion that it was quite impossible to keep one's footing without holding on to something; while to secure a meal demanded a series of feats of dexterity that would have turned

a professional acrobat green with envy. And all this discomfort was emphasised, as it were, by the yelling and hooting and shrieking of the wind aloft, the roar of the angry sea, and the heavy, perpetual swish of spray upon the deck.

It was about three bells in the first watch that night, when—I being in charge of the deck, and the skipper keeping me company—a light was made out upon our lee bow, quickly followed by another, and another, and still another, until the whole of the horizon ahead was lighted up like a town, there being probably over two hundred lights in sight. It was evident that we were approaching a large concourse of ships; and in about an hour's time we found ourselves driving into the very heart of the fleet. The night was altogether too dark for us to be enabled to make out who and what they were; but the skipper was of opinion that we had encountered a large convoy, and as it was impossible to tell whether they were friends or foes, he determined to wear the schooner round, as soon as we could find room, and heave her to with her head to the westward, like the rest of the fleet, when the morning would enable us to ascertain the nationality of our neighbours and decide whether anything was likely to be gained by keeping them company. At eight bells, therefore, by which time we had passed right through the fleet, we got the schooner round and waited impatiently until morning. There was a good deal of firing of blank cartridge, throughout the night, as also of signalling with coloured lanterns; but we could, of course, make nothing of it, and took it simply to mean that the men-o'-war in charge of the convoy were doing their best to keep the fleet from becoming scattered during the continuance of the gale.

When morning dawned, and the light came struggling feebly through the thick pall of murky, storm-torn vapour that overspread the sky, it became apparent that the skipper's surmise as to the character of the fleet had been correct: the *Dolphin* being in the midst of some two hundred and fifty sail of vessels of different rigs, from the stately ship to the saucy schooner, in charge of two seventy-fours, a fifty-gun ship, a frigate, and four eighteen-gun-brigs. The men-o'-war were all snugged comfortably down, royal and topgallant yards on deck, topgallant-masts struck, and not an ounce of unnecessary top-hamper aloft; but most of the merchantmen had kept everything standing, even to their royal-yards. There were a few, however—mostly the larger craft,—who had sent down their top-hamper; and there were others—notably a very fine, frigate-built ship—that had lost one or more of their spars during the gale, and were now in great difficulties, with the

wreck thrashing about aloft and not only threatening the remaining spars, but also the lives of the crew, who could be seen endeavouring to cut the raffle adrift. That the convoy was British became apparent as soon as the light grew strong enough to enable us to distinctly make out our nearest neighbours.

It struck me that the men-o'-war's people were not keeping their eyes quite so wide open as they might have done; for there were only four other schooners beside ourselves in the whole fleet, and one would have supposed that the presence of a fifth would instantly have been noticed—especially when that fifth wore so very roguish an appearance as the *Dolphin*,—yet throughout the whole of that day no effort was made to ascertain our nationality, where we came from, whither we were bound, or anything about us! Of course, under ordinary circumstances, having ascertained that the convoy was British, and, therefore, of no especial interest to us, we should have parted company by getting the schooner round with her head to the southward. There was, however, one circumstance that decided the skipper to keep company with the convoy a little longer, and it was this: As has already been mentioned, there was a very fine, frigate-built merchantman in the fleet, which, when morning dawned, was seen to be in a situation of considerable difficulty, her fore and mizzen-topmast and main-topgallant-mast being over the side, having apparently been carried away during the night by the tremendous rolling and pitching of the ship. And near her was an exceedingly smart-looking brigantine, with main-topmast and fore topgallant-mast housed. This vessel joined the convoy about daybreak and was now hove-to under a close-reefed main trysail, and fore-topmast-staysail, which ought to have enabled her to easily forge ahead and eat out to windward of the disabled ship. And, as a matter of fact, she did so; yet somehow she always seemed to drop back again into her old place, just to leeward of the ship; and after observing her motions for some time, I became impressed with the idea that this was the result of deliberate design, rather than of accident. For something seemed to be constantly going wrong with her trysail sheet, necessitating a temporary taking in of the sail, during which she would pay off and go wallowing away to leeward for a distance of three or four miles, when the sail would be reset, and she would come creeping stealthily and imperceptibly up into somewhere near her old berth again. And this was done so naturally that, had it not occurred more than once, I do not know that I should have taken any notice of it. To me, however, the circumstance wore a rather suspicious appearance; and

when I had mentioned it to the skipper he seemed somewhat disposed to take my view that the craft, although apparently British built, was in reality an enemy's privateer, with designs upon the disabled ship as soon as a favourable opportunity should occur for carrying them out. At all events there appeared to be enough probability in the hypothesis to induce Captain Winter to remain in company of the convoy, to watch the progress of events, instead of wearing round and resuming our course to the southward.

The gale continued to blow all day with unabated fury, and the convoy, of course, remained hove-to. But, as the hours wore on, the several craft gradually became more scattered, the less weatherly vessels steadily settling away to leeward, until, by the time that the dark, gloomy day drew toward its close, the fleet was spread out over a surface of ocean measuring, as nearly as one could judge, nearly or quite twelve miles in every direction: those craft that had sustained damage aloft naturally for the most part settling to leeward at a greater rate than the rest, since they were unable to dispose their canvas so advantageously as the others for the purpose of lying-to. The frigate and gun-brigs were kept busy all day watching these stragglers, urging them by signal, and the occasional firing of guns, to close with the main body of the fleet, and generally playing the part of sheep-dogs; while the crews of the lame ducks could be seen clearing away the wreck of their broken spars, unbending their split sails and bending others in place, and, in fact, doing their utmost to comply with the orders of the men-o'-war. But, after all, their utmost was but little; the merchantmen being altogether too lightly manned to be able to do really effective work in the face of such a gale as was then blowing. The brigantine that had excited our suspicions had come in for a share of the attention of one of the gun-brigs, and it was noticeable that, after the man-o'-war had run down and hailed her, no further accidents appeared to have happened aboard her, so that the disabled ship had gradually settled away some five miles astern and to leeward of her. Just as the darkness was closing down upon us, however, she took in her trysail and fore-topmast-staysail, and set a main-staysail instead; but they were so long about it that, when at length the change had been effected, the ship had drawn up to within about half a mile of the brigantine's lee quarter. I directed Captain Winter's attention to this, and he agreed with me that the manoeuvre had an exceedingly suspicious appearance.

"The ship, however, is quite safe for the present," he remarked; "for, even assuming the brigantine to be a Frenchman and a

privateer, her people can do nothing so long as it continues to blow so heavily as at present. But directly that the wind shows signs of dropping we may look out; and if we observe any further suspicious manoeuvres we may safely conclude that she is French, and, if the men-o'-war do not forestall us, we will have a slap at her; for she appears to be a wonderfully fast and weatherly craft and is certainly a most magnificent sea-boat."

I determined that I would keep a sharp eye upon the movements of that brigantine—for I could not rid my mind of a very strong suspicion that her people meant mischief,—and I accordingly watched her until she had displayed her light, which I then pointed out to a man whom I told off for the especial purpose of keeping his eye on it; it being my intention to persuade the skipper, if possible, to run down a little closer to her when it had become sufficiently dark to conceal our movements from observation. Captain Winter offered no objection to my proposal; and accordingly, at eight bells of the second dog-watch, when the deck was relieved, our helm was put up and we edged away down toward the light which was stated to be that of the brigantine. But when at length, by careful manoeuvring, we had contrived to approach within biscuit-toss of the vessel displaying it, it was discovered, to my chagrin, that she was not the brigantine, but a large barque, the skipper of which appeared to be greatly frightened at our sudden appearance near him; for he hailed us, in execrable French, that he was armed, and that if we did not sheer off forthwith he would fire into us. I replied, in English, that he need not be afraid of us, as we were British, like himself, and then inquired whether he had seen a large brigantine in his neighbourhood. I got a reply to my question, it is true, but it was utterly incomprehensible; and I doubt very much whether the man understood what I had said to him; for the wind rendered it almost impossible for the most powerful voice to make itself heard, unless at a very short distance and dead to windward, as was the barque when her skipper hailed us. We made several attempts to find the brigantine that night, but somehow failed to stumble across either her or the disabled ship upon which we suspected her of entertaining designs.

Chapter Nine.

A narrow escape, and a fortunate discovery.

About midnight there were signs that the gale had pretty well blown itself out. There was a distinct, if not very strongly-marked decrease in the strength of the wind, and about an hour before dawn the veil of impenetrable vapour overhead broke away, showing, first of all, a small patch of clear sky, with half a dozen stars or so blinking out of it, and then other and larger patches, with more stars; until, by the time of sunrise, the sky was clear, save for the thin detached tatters of fleecy vapour that still swept scurrying away to the northward and eastward.

It was my morning watch on deck; and with the first grey light of early dawn I indulged in a thoroughly searching scrutiny of the fleet—or as much of it as still remained in sight,—on the look-out for the brigantine; but I failed to discover any traces either of her or of the disabled ship. This I considered not only surprising but exceedingly suspicious; as the crew of the ship had contrived, during the previous day, to clear away the wreck of their top-hamper, and to get their craft once more under command by setting their fore and main-topsails and a make-shift fore-staysail, under which the vessel appeared to be doing exceedingly well when the darkness of the preceding night had closed down upon the convoy. Indeed, so well had she been doing that it occurred to me as possible that she might, during the night, have managed to work herself into a tolerably weatherly position, relatively to the rest of the fleet; and I therefore took the ship's telescope and went up as far as the cross-trees, to see whether, from that elevation, I could discover anything of her to windward. But although I spent a long half-hour aloft, carefully scrutinising every craft in sight, I was quite unable to pick up either the ship or the brigantine. I was still aloft when the skipper made his appearance on deck; and, as I had by that time about concluded my search, upon seeing him looking up at me I gave one more comprehensive glance round the horizon, and then descended to make my report.

"It is exceedingly odd," remarked the skipper, when I had assured him that both vessels had vanished. "What can have become of them? The brigantine can scarcely have taken the ship; for there has been, and still is, far too much sea for boats to live in; and nobody but a madman would ever dream of running a ship aboard in such weather; it would simply mean the destruction of both craft. I wonder, now, whether that actually is the explanation of their disappearance? But, no; the man who commanded that brigantine was a sailor, whatever flag he may have sailed under, and no sailor would even so

much as think of attempting such a foolhardy trick! What is your opinion, George?"

"I quite agree with you, sir, as to the impossibility of boarding a ship in such weather as that of last night," I answered. "Yet the fact remains that both craft have vanished. And I do not believe that their disappearance is the result of any accident such as, for instance, one of them running foul of the other during the darkness. Depend upon it, sir, the brigantine is safe enough; and, wherever she may be at this moment, the ship is not far from her."

"Well, it is a very extraordinary circumstance," observed the skipper; "but I am inclined to believe, with you, that the disappearance of the one is intimately connected with the disappearance of the other. The question now is, in which direction ought they to be looked for?"

I considered the matter a little, and then said:

"It appears to me, sir, that there is at least one direction in which—supposing our suspicions to be correct—they are quite certain not to be found, and that is to windward, in which direction the convoy will soon be making sail. If the brigantine is an enemy, and has had any hand in the disappearance of the ship, depend upon it she would not shape a course that would involve her being overtaken in a few hours by the convoy, hampered as she would be by the disabled ship. Nor do I think she would be altogether likely to run away to leeward; because if the ship happens to be missed by the men-o'-war—as she pretty certainly will be before long,—that is precisely the direction in which she would naturally be looked for. Here we are, all hove-to on the larboard tack, and my impression is that both vessels have remained on that tack; but, instead of being hove-to all night, like the rest of us, they have ratched away through the fleet, and have disappeared away there in the north-western board."

"There is a good deal of sound reason and common sense in that argument of yours, George, and, upon my word, I don't know that we could do better than act upon it," answered the skipper meditatively.

"The sooner the better, sir, I think, if you will excuse me for saying so," answered I. "The frigate yonder is signalling to the gun-brigs, who are all answering her; and that, to my mind, looks very much as though the absence of the ship and the brigantine has just been discovered. If so, we shall probably

have some of the men-o'-war coming through the fleet making inquiries. And although we have our papers to show, I must confess I am not in love with the neighbourhood of those gentry. They may take it into their heads to order us to keep company until they can come aboard to examine our papers; and, should that happen, we may say good-bye to twenty or thirty of our best men, to say nothing of our chance of finding the brigantine. See, sir, the brigs are shaking out a reef already."

"Ay, so they are," assented the skipper. "You are right, George; it is high time for us to be off. You may make sail at once. Those brigs sail fairly well in moderate weather, but they are very crank, and I believe we can run away from them in such weather as this. Here is one of them hereaway now, who looks as though she would like to have a word with us. Give the little hooker all that she will bear, George; and if that fellow wants to try his rate of sailing with us, he is heartily welcome to do so."

I looked in the direction indicated by the skipper, and saw one of the gun-brigs about a mile and a half astern, heading straight up for us, with the men upon her yards shaking out a reef from her topsails. There was no time to lose, so I sang out to the men; and, the tone of my voice probably indicating the urgency of the case, they sprang into the rigging and came tumbling aft, and almost as soon as the brig had got her topsail-halliards sweated up, we were under double-reefed topsail, double-reefed mainsail, foresail, fore-staysail, and jib, leaving the rest of the fleet as though they had been at anchor. The brig astern now fired a gun as a signal for us to heave-to, but the shot never came near us, and the only notice that we took of it was to hoist our colours. This caused the brig to give chase in earnest, shaking out another reef in her topsails, and firing again. It was perfectly clear that we were looked upon with strong suspicion, and I had no doubt whatever that, if we were caught, we should be detained until the weather had moderated sufficiently for a boat to be sent aboard us. A few minutes, however, proved sufficient to set our minds at rest with regard to the brig astern; she was being pressed altogether too much—for although the gale had certainly broken, it was still blowing heavily,—she was careened almost gunwale-to, and was sagging away to leeward bodily, as well as dropping astern of us. But unfortunately there were two other brigs, one about a mile to leeward and another about the same distance to windward, which now, in obedience to signals thrown out by the frigate, took up the chase, and matters began to look exceedingly awkward for us. The brig to leeward I cared nothing

about; I felt satisfied that we could outsail and out-weather her; but it was the fellow to windward that caused me to feel anxious, for he was edging down upon us, and in a comparatively short time would have us under his guns. Luckily for us, there were a good many craft between us and this vessel, and there was a whole crowd of them ahead, into the thick of which we steered, in the hope that by threading our way among them we should render it almost impossible for our pursuers to fire upon us for fear of hitting some of the other vessels.

All three of the brigs in chase were now under double-reefed topsails, and the way in which they drove along through the mountainous sea, now soaring up to the crest of a wave in a smother of spray, showing the whole of their fore-foot and some twenty feet of keel, and anon diving furiously into a hollow, burying themselves to the windlass bitts, was a sight worth seeing. The brig to windward had taken up the pursuit by edging broad away for us, but her people were not long in discovering that this would not do; the lively little *Dolphin* was justifying her name by almost flying through the water, and we fore-reached out so rapidly that our friend quickly had to haul her wind again, and even then we were bringing her fast upon our weather quarter, although she was steadily decreasing the distance between us and herself. At length she tried a gun, and the shot struck the water some distance ahead and on our weather-bow. We were nearly, if not quite, within range. A few minutes later she fired again, and this time the shot fell so close that the spray actually wetted our jib-boom. But we were now close to a straggling bunch of some thirty or forty vessels, and before the brig could again fire we were among them, and for fully five minutes it became impossible for her to fire without running the risk of hitting one of them. This gave us a very handsome lift, of which we availed ourselves to the utmost; and the brig to leeward being now well on our lee quarter, Captain Winter thought he might venture to edge away a point, which brought the brig to windward broad on our weather quarter. The critical moment was now fast approaching, for the last-mentioned vessel was now very nearly as close to us as she would be at all, and if we could manage to weather out the next twenty minutes without mishap we might hope to make good our escape. We were soon clear of the cluster of shipping that had afforded us protection, and the moment that we were so the brig to windward again opened fire, the conviction of her people, no doubt, being by this time that we were an enemy, despite the British ensign streaming from our gaff-end. We heard the shot go humming over our mast-heads, and although

it did no damage I could see that the skipper was beginning to feel very uneasy, as he kept glancing from the brig to our own sails, as though debating within himself the desirability of hazarding the attempt to give the schooner a little more canvas. Presently we saw the brig luff momentarily into the wind, a line of flame and smoke burst from her lee broadside, and nine six-pound shot came skipping along the water toward us. The broadside was splendidly aimed, but, luckily for us, the moment of firing was badly chosen, or the guns were too much depressed, for none of the shot reached us. Almost at the same moment the brig to leeward began firing, but her shot fell so far short that from that moment she gave us no further concern whatever. The luffing of the brig to windward gave us a slight advantage, as by so doing she fell astern several fathoms; moreover, she had by this time settled so far away on our quarter that a few minutes more would suffice to bring her almost directly into our wake, and I felt that, once there, we should have very little more to fear from her. This impression was quickly confirmed, for after her late experience she fired no more broadsides, the only guns that she could now bring to bear being her bow-chasers, and although the next three or four shot came unpleasantly near to us, those that succeeded fell short, and by the time that we were abreast of the most northerly stragglers of the convoy we were practically safe, provided that none of our gear carried away. Of this, however, we had but little fear, as our rigging was all new and of the very best. Fortunately for us, none of the big men-o'-war condescended to take part in the chase, or, from the weatherly position which they occupied, there is very little doubt that they would have cut us off. As it was, the brigs maintained the pursuit for a distance of some sixteen miles altogether, when they were recalled by signal from the commodore.

We were greatly elated at this escape, for although the utmost that we had to fear was the loss, by impressment, of some of our men, the maintenance of our crew intact was an important matter with us, the more so now that we were bound upon what might prove to be a lengthened cruise, during the progress of which many vacancies might be expected to occur,—either by the necessity to send away prize crews or otherwise,—which we should have little or no chance to fill up. But, over and above this, our adventure with the gun-brigs had afforded us a brief but sufficient opportunity to thoroughly test the powers of the schooner under circumstances of about as adverse a character as could well be imagined, and the triumphant manner in which she had more than justified our most sanguine anticipations gave us unbounded confidence in her.

By noon that day the wind had moderated sufficiently to permit of our shaking out another reef, and when the sun went down out of a clear sky, shooting his last rays in a long trail of burning gold athwart the tumbling waste of still tumultuous waters, the *Dolphin* was once more under all plain sail, and speeding to the westward in the direction that we surmised had been taken by the brigantine and the ship. During the night the wind dropped still further, and the following morning found us, with our sails barely filled, creeping lazily along over a long, low swell that had already begun to wear that streaky, oily appearance which sometimes heralds the approach of a stark calm. Our calculations had led us to hope that with the appearance of daylight on this particular morning we should sight the brigantine and her prize, as we had grown to consider the disabled ship; but, greatly to our disappointment, nothing was to be seen in any direction, even from the lofty elevation of our royal-yard. As the day wore on the wind died away altogether, and by noon the schooner had lost steerage-way, her head boxing the compass as she floated on the glass-smooth undulations that alone remained to tell of the elemental fury that had raged over the spot but a few hours previously.

We remained thus becalmed for fifty-four hours, so utterly devoid of movement that the ash-dust and galley refuse hove overboard by the cook during that time collected into an unsightly patch alongside, just abaft the larboard fore-rigging, in the exact spot where they had been thrown. The weather was now excessively hot, and those of us who could swim took advantage of so favourable an opportunity for bathing by spending most of our time off duty in the water alongside, until the appearance of a shark's fin or two, at no great distance, warned us of the danger of such a proceeding, and caused the skipper to issue an order that no man was to go overboard without especial permission.

A few hours of such weather, after the gale, would have been an agreeable change, affording us, as it did, an excellent opportunity to dry our drenched clothing; but it was spun out so long that we were all heartily glad when, toward sunset on the second day of the calm, a delicate line of blue, betokening the approach of a breeze, appeared along the northern horizon; and by the time that the sun had sunk out of sight, the first faint breathings reached us. We had by this time arrived at the conclusion that my surmise relative to the movements of the brigantine of suspicious character was erroneous, and that she had steered in some other direction. As soon, therefore, as our canvas filled and the schooner gathered steerage-way, a course

was shaped for the south-west; the skipper and I having made up our minds that the West Indian waters afforded the most promising field for the operations of such enterprising privateersmen as ourselves.

The breeze that had come to us proved to be but a very languid zephyr after all, a scarcely perceptible breathing, just sufficient to give the schooner steerage-way, and to drift us along at the rate of a bare two knots, to the south-west, through the soft, mysterious sheen of the star-lit night. With the dawning of the new day matters improved somewhat, our speed rising to nearly four knots. When I went on deck at six bells, to get a salt-water shower-bath in the head, I found the schooner gently stealing along over a smooth sea, softly wrinkled to a most delicate azure hue by the light touch of the faint breeze that came to us, cool, sweet, and refreshing, out of the north. The sky was a deep, pure, cloudless blue overhead, merging, by a thousand subtle gradations, into a warm, pinky, primrose tint along the horizon; and away to the north, low down in the sky, there floated a few indefinite, softly-luminous cloud shapes that gave us some reason to hope that we might be favoured with a more robust breeze later on in the day, notwithstanding the oily-looking streaks and patches of calm that appeared here and there upon the ocean's surface. The watch were busily engaged in swabbing the deck subsequent to a vigorous treatment with the holystone; the freshly-polished brasswork and the guns flashed like gold in the brilliant morning sunlight; the white canvas swelled and sank gently, as the schooner curtsied upon the almost imperceptible heaving of the swell; everything looked fresh and bright and cheerful, and a thin wreath of smoke that floated lazily out of the galley funnel and away over the lee cat-head to the melody of a rollicking sea-ditty chanted by the cook, as he busied himself with the preparation of breakfast, imparted that sense of homeliness and light-hearted happiness which seemed to be all that was required to satisfactorily complete the picture.

Breakfast was over, and I had just set the watch to work upon certain jobs requiring the doing, when a boy, whom I had sent aloft to grease down the topmasts, as a punishment for some trifling misdemeanour, reported two sail, close together, broad on our starboard beam, and steering the same way as ourselves. In reply to an inquiry respecting their appearance, he furnished us with the further information that one was a brigantine, but he could not quite make out the rig of the other, although he thought she was a ship. I immediately suspected, from this reply, that we had accidentally tumbled upon the

identical two craft that we were most anxious to find; and, the better to satisfy myself upon this important point, I took the ship's telescope and journeyed up to the royal-yard, from whence I should obtain the most satisfactory view of them possible. They were at least twenty miles distant, and therefore quite invisible from the deck, while even from the royal-yard their upper canvas only, and the heads of their lower sails, were to be seen; but I had not got them within the field of the telescope more than a minute when I became convinced that the lost was found—that they were the two vessels for which we had been looking. The ship was under quite a respectable jury-rig, and was carrying topgallant-sails and jib, while the brigantine seemed to be under double-reefed canvas, doubtless to moderate her speed to that of the disabled ship. They were close together, and steering to the south-west like ourselves. Having thoroughly satisfied myself upon these points, I descended and made my report to the skipper.

The old fellow chuckled and rubbed his hands. "What a lucky thing it was that the breeze did not freshen during the night," he remarked. "Had it done so we should have passed those two craft without seeing them; whereas now, if all goes well, we will have the pair of them before dark. And to think that we were grumbling about the light airs during the night! Upon my word, I am beginning to believe that the parsons are only speaking the simple truth when they say that we can never tell what is really best for us. However, this is not the time to discuss matters of that sort. How do you say the vessels bear from us?"

"Broad on the lee bow, sir, or as nearly as possible dead to leeward," answered I.

"Then, if we keep away a couple of points we shall just about hit them off," remarked the skipper. He gave the necessary instructions to the helmsman, and then, turning again to me, continued:

"We may as well get this business over as soon as possible, George; so get the stunsails, big gaff-topsail, and main-topmast-staysail on her at once, my lad, and give the little hooker a chance to go through the water."

These additions to our canvas were soon made, and then the watch returned to the work upon which they had been previously engaged, as we did not expect to overtake the object of our pursuit for several hours.

It was just noon, and we were still engaged upon our observations of the sun for the determination of the latitude, when the captain made out, through the telescope of his sextant, the mast-heads of the brigantine just peeping above the line of the southern horizon; and while we were in the cabin getting our dinner, Comben, who had charge of the deck, reported, through the open skylight, that the brigantine had apparently just sighted us, for she had hauled her wind and was making sail.

"All right," remarked the skipper; "so much the better. That just suits me, for we shall get to fisticuffs all the sooner, and get the whole business comfortably over by dark. Let her go along as she is, Mr Comben."

We finished our dinner comfortably, and then went on deck, to find that the brigantine had reached out well across our fore-foot; and shortly afterwards she tacked, heading well up to meet us. She was then about nine miles off, and some four points on our starboard bow; the ship being, perhaps, twelve miles distant, bearing a point on our port bow. The wind had freshened a trifle during the forenoon, and was now blowing a pretty little breeze that sent us along at about six knots; and if it would but freshen a trifle more it would become a perfect working breeze for a fight between two such craft as the brigantine and ourselves. As it was, I was by no means dissatisfied, for there was just wind enough to ensure the proper working of the schooner, while the water was smooth enough to admit of our laying our adversary aboard without injury to either vessel. The men were given plenty of time to finish their dinner in peace and comfort; a tot of grog was served out to them, and then all hands cleared the decks for action; the galley fire was extinguished, the magazine opened, powder and shot passed on deck, cutlasses and pistols served out, and the latter loaded; and then the crew went to quarters. The brigantine was by this time within three miles of us; we allowed her to close to within two miles, and then shortened sail to mainsail, foresail, topsail, topgallant-sail, and jibs, hoisted our colours, and fired a gun.

Chapter Ten.

The affair of the Tigre and the Manilla.

The brigantine was at this time under all plain sail, to her royal and main-topmast-staysail, standing toward us, close-hauled, on the port tack; but we had no sooner shortened sail and hoisted our colours than she did the same, displaying a very large tricolour at her peak.

"Very good," commented the skipper approvingly; "that settles the question of her nationality, at all events, and shows that she is prepared to fight for the prize yonder, that she has somehow managed to secure. Well, I'm glad of it, George, for she is a wonderfully handsome craft, powerful, fast, and half as big again as we are; she will be quite worth the trouble of taking, I believe. A man ought to be able to do good work with such a fine vessel as that under his feet. There she comes round. Very pretty! very pretty indeed! Why, she works like a top! And look at the beam of her, and the height and spread of her spars! Upon my word it seems a pity to knock about such a beauty as that with shot! I suppose it will be impossible to avoid doing her some damage, but we must knock her about as little as possible. I tell you what, George, I believe our best plan will be to make short work of her. If we play the game of 'hammer and tongs' we shall maul each other fearfully before we compel her to haul down her colours; so let the men clap a charge of grape and canister in on top of their round shot. We will run her aboard at once, firing as we touch; board in the smoke, and drive her people below, out of hand."

This was quite in accordance with my own fancy, for, as the skipper had said, the brigantine was half as big again as the *Dolphin*; she mounted fourteen guns to our eleven, and the chances were that, in a fair stand-up fight, she might disable us to such an extent as to render her own escape and that of her prize an easy matter. So I went round the decks and personally saw to the execution of the skipper's orders, explaining to the men his intentions, warning them not to fire until they got the word, and cautioning all hands to be ready to follow the skipper and myself on to the brigantine's decks the instant that the two vessels were properly secured to each other.

The brigantine had gone about while the skipper was speaking to me, and was now on our port bow, standing toward us on the starboard tack, and, with the exception of our own gun of defiance, neither vessel had as yet fired. It looked almost as if she were waiting for us to begin, in order that she might ascertain our weight of metal; but when the two craft were within about a quarter of a mile of each other our antagonist suddenly yawed and gave us her whole starboard broadside of

seven twelve-pound shot. The guns were excellently aimed, the seven shot flying close over our heads and passing through our sails. But the seven perforations in our canvas represented the full extent of the damage, not one of our spars being hit, or so much as a rope-yarn cut. I could see that our lads' fingers were itching to return the fire, the captains of the guns squinting along the sights of their pieces and audibly remarking that the elevation was just right if the skipper would but luff and give them a chance to show what they could do; but I steadied them by passing along from gun to gun telling them that, if they would but have patience, their chance would come in a few minutes, in answer to which many of them clapped their hands to their cutlasses to make sure that they were loose in their sheaths, while others drew their pistols and carefully examined the priming.

The brigantine luffed again immediately that she had fired, and we were now so close that I could see her people busily reloading. The two vessels were rapidly nearing each other, and I was in hopes that we should close before it would be possible for them to fire again. But there was a man on board, who, by his gestures, seemed to be urging them to expedite their work, and when we were only some twenty fathoms distant, while the brigantine was crossing our bows, I saw the guns again run out.

"Look out, sir," I shouted to the skipper; "they are about to fire again! Luff, or they will rake us!"

The skipper signed with his hand, and the helmsman gave the wheel a powerful whirl to starboard. The schooner swerved round, and almost at the same instant crash came another broadside, slap into us this time. There was a perceptible concussion as the shot struck, followed by a crashing and splintering of wood, two or three piercing shrieks of agony, and five men fell to the deck, with the blood welling out of the dreadful wounds inflicted by the shot and flying splinters. Then, as we bore down upon the brigantine, the skipper raised a warning cry. I drew my sword and rushed forward to head the boarders from that part of the ship. The skipper gave the word to fire, and, as our broadside rang out, the two vessels crashed together. There was an indescribable tumult of thudding shot, rending wood, groans, shrieks, and execrations on board the Frenchman, and, with a shout of "Hurrah, lads; follow me, and make short work of it!" I leaped on to the brigantine's rail and down on deck.

The spacious deck of the French ship seemed to be crowded with men, as far as I could see through the thick pall of powder

smoke that wreathed and twisted hither and thither in the eddying draughts of wind, but there were great gaps among them filled with prostrate figures, heaped upon each other, some lying stark and still, others writhing and screaming with agony, bearing fearful witness to the havoc wrought by our grape and canister, the discharge of which, at such close quarters, seemed to have stunned and stupefied the Frenchmen, for not a hand was raised to oppose me as I sprang down off the rail. I darted a quick glance along the deck, noticed that the skipper was leading his party on board, aft, and then made a cut at the Frenchman nearest me.

This woke him up. He hurriedly raised his cutlass to guard the blow, and the next moment we were at it, cut, thrust, and parry, as hard as we could go. Our attack being made upon the two extremities of the brigantine's deck, we soon had her crew hemmed in between the skipper's and my own party, and for the next ten minutes there was as pretty a fight as one need wish to witness, the Frenchmen rallying gallantly to the call of their captain. The hubbub was terrific, the clash of steel, the popping of pistols, the shrieks, groans, and outcries of the wounded, the execrations of the Frenchmen, the cheers of our own lads, and the grinding of the ships together, creating a perfectly indescribable medley of sound. The struggle threatened to be stubborn and protracted, the Frenchmen at our end of the ship obstinately disputing every inch of the deck with us. I therefore determined to make a special effort, and see what the mere physical strength, of which I possessed a goodly share, would do for us.

There was a handspike lying upon the deck, under my feet, which I had tripped over and kicked aside twice or thrice, so, suddenly hitting out with my left fist, I knocked down the man who happened to be at the moment opposed to me, quickly stooped and seized the handspike, dropped my sword, and, singing out to our own lads to give me room, I swung my new weapon round my head and brought it down with a crash upon the two or three Frenchmen nearest me. The force of the blow made my arm tingle to the elbow, but it swept the Frenchmen down as though it had been a scythe, and caused those behind to recoil in terror. Another flail-like sweep proved equally effective, the cutlasses raised to guard the blows being as useless as so many wands, and when I followed it up with a third it proved too much for the Frenchmen, who, seeing their comrades go down before me like ninepins, gave way with a yell of dismay, retreating aft until they were all jammed and huddled together like sheep, so closely that they had no room

to fight effectively. The French captain, as I took him to be, finding things going badly in our direction, forced his way through the crowd, and, perhaps regarding me as the chief mischief-maker, levelled a pistol at my head and fired. I felt the ball graze my scalp, but at the same instant my handspike descended upon the unhappy man's head. I saw the blood spurt out over his face, and down he went. This proved sufficient. The Frenchmen nearest me threw down their weapons and cried that they surrendered. The cry was taken up by the rest, and the brigantine was won.

The first thing now to be done was to see to the wounded. The carnage had been very great in proportion to the numbers engaged, and our men had no sooner sheathed their weapons than they went to work among the ghastly prostrate forms to separate the wounded from the dead. This task was soon completed, and it was then discovered that our loss had not been nearly so great as I had feared; the dead amounting to eleven, and the wounded to nineteen, three of whom were dangerously injured. Our own dead and wounded were carefully removed to the schooner, and then,—the unwounded Frenchmen having been driven below and securely confined in the hold,—the skipper put me in charge of the prize, with a crew of twenty men, and the two craft made sail in company, in pursuit of the merchantman, which was now hull-down in the south-western quarter. The moment that the two craft were clear of each other, and the sails trimmed, I set my people to work to convey the wounded Frenchmen below to the cabin, where, the vessel by good luck being provided with a surgeon, they were quickly attended to. When this was done it was found that the French loss totalled up to no less than twenty-seven killed and forty-four wounded, out of a complement of one hundred men with which she had commenced the engagement. She was a heavily-manned vessel, for, in addition to the number already given, she had thirty men on board the prize.

Having seen the wounded carried below, the dead thrown overboard, and the decks washed down, I had an opportunity to look about me a bit, and take stock of the noble craft that we had captured. She turned out to be the *Tigre* of Nantes, thirty-four days out, during which she had captured only one prize, namely, the ship of which we were now in pursuit. She was a brand-new vessel, measuring three hundred and seventy-six tons, oak-built, coppered, and copper fastened; of immense beam, and very shallow, drawing only ten feet six inches of water. She was extraordinarily fast with the wind over her quarter, running away from the *Dolphin* easily. But I suspected

that in a thrash to windward, in anything of a breeze, the schooner would prove to be quite a match for her, with, perhaps, a trifle to spare. She mounted fourteen twelve-pounders, and her magazine was crammed with ammunition, it having been the intention of her captain to try his luck, like ourselves, in the West Indian waters.

It was about six bells in the afternoon watch when we filled away in pursuit of the ship, and the sun was within half an hour of his setting when we overtook and brought her to, the *Dolphin* being at that time some two miles astern of us. I knew that there were thirty Frenchmen on board her, but did not anticipate any resistance from them, since it would be perfectly clear to them that anything of the kind, although it might temporarily prevent our taking possession, would be utterly useless in the end, and only result in loss of life. I therefore lowered a boat, and, taking with me ten men armed to the teeth, proceeded on board and secured undisputed possession of the ship. My first act was to release the crew of the prize, after which the disarmed Frenchmen were transferred to the brigantine, and confined below along with their comrades, and while this was still in process of performance the *Dolphin* joined company, and Captain Winter came on board. He fully approved of all that had been done, and directed me to remain on board in charge, shifting himself over into the brigantine and placing the schooner under the temporary command of Comben. By the time that all these arrangements had been completed the night had fallen, dinner was about to be served in the cuddy, and at the earnest invitation of the captain of the ship, the skipper accepted a seat at the table. Meanwhile, all three of the craft had been hauled to the wind, on the larboard tack, and were heading to the eastward, the ship under everything that her jury-rig would permit to be set, and the schooner and brigantine under double-reefed topsails.

We now had an opportunity to learn some few particulars relating to our prize, and the circumstances of her capture by the French privateer, the latter being somewhat remarkable. The ship, it appeared, was named the *Manilla*, and was homeward-bound with a rich cargo of spices and other rare commodities, including several tons of ivory which she had shipped at the Cape, together with a number of passengers. She had here joined the homeward-bound convoy, and all had gone well with her until the springing up of the gale during which we had fallen in with the convoy. During this gale, however, she had laboured so heavily that she had not only lost her fore and mizzen-topmasts and her main-topgallant-mast,

but she had also strained so much that she had made a great deal of water, necessitating frequent and long spells at the pumps. This, and the clearing away of the wreck of her top-hamper, had, as might have been expected, greatly exhausted the crew, the result being that, on the night of her capture, the look-out was not quite so keen as perhaps it should have been. But after all, as the captain remarked, there really did not appear to be any necessity for the maintenance of an especially bright look-out beyond what was required to provide against their falling foul of any of the other ships belonging to the convoy, and although he admitted that he had noticed both the brigantine and the *Dolphin*, which he had immediately set down as privateers, he did not consider them as enemies, and even if any such suspicion had entered his mind he would not have deemed himself liable to attack within sight and reach of eight men-o'-war. Therefore, when night came on, he allowed his exhausted crew to get what rest they could, keeping only a sufficient number of men on deck to meet any ordinary emergency. He was thus profoundly astonished and chagrined at being awakened about one o'clock in the morning to find his crew overpowered and safely confined below, and his ship in possession of a crew of thirty Frenchmen. How they had contrived to get on board, in the height of so heavy a gale, and with so tremendous a sea running, he had been unable to ascertain, the Frenchman in charge resolutely refusing to explain.

Such was the extraordinary story told by the captain of the *Manilla*; and that it was absolutely true there could be no doubt, for we had ourselves seen enough to assure us of that. I was greatly disappointed, however, at the captain's inability to explain by what means the Frenchmen had contrived to board the ship in the face of such formidable difficulties; for that was precisely the point that had puzzled me all through, and I resolved to find out, if I could, for such a secret was quite worth the knowing.

Captain Winter had determined to return home with his prizes; and we accordingly continued to steer to the eastward all that night. The next morning at daybreak I turned to the hands and went to work to complete the jury-rig that the Frenchmen had so well begun; and, as the *Manilla* happened to be well provided with spare spars, we contrived, after two days' hard work, to get her back to something like her former appearance, and to so greatly increase her sailing powers that the brigantine and the schooner could shake the reefs out of their topsails without running away from us. Meanwhile the wind had gradually

hauled round until we had got it well over our starboard quarter, and were booming along at a speed of eight knots, with studding-sails set.

The officer who had been put in charge of the *Manilla* when she fell into the hands of the French privateersmen was a very fine young fellow named Dumaresq; a smart seaman, high-spirited, and as brave as a lion. We early took a fancy to each other, especially after I had offered him his parole, and we soon became exceedingly friendly. He possessed a rich fund of amusing anecdote, together with the art of telling a story well; he was refined in manner, excellently educated, and an accomplished pianist; he was, therefore, quite an acquisition to the cuddy, and now that the ship was no longer in his possession, was heartily welcomed there by Captain Chesney and his passengers. I scarcely ever turned in until after midnight, and by and by young Dumaresq contracted the habit of joining me on the poop and smoking a cigar with me after the passengers had retired for the night; and upon one of these occasions our conversation turned upon the clever capture of the ship by himself and his countrymen. This aroused my curiosity afresh, and after he had been talking for some time about it, I said:

"But how in the world did you manage to get aboard in such terrific weather? That is what puzzles me!"

"No doubt, *mon cher*," he answered with a laugh. "And how to manage it was just what puzzled us for a time also. We knew that our only chance was to do it during the height of the gale; for if we had waited until the weather moderated, we should have had some of your men-o'-war looking after us and instituting unpleasant inquiries which we should have found it exceedingly difficult to answer. So, after considerable cogitation, poor Captain Lefevre—whose brains I understand you were unkind enough to beat out with a handspike—hit upon a plan which he thought might succeed. We had a few barrels of oil on board, and one of these he broached for the purpose of testing his idea. He had a canvas bag made, capable of containing about four gallons of the oil, and this bag he filled, bent its closed end on to a rope, and threw the affair overboard, paying out the rope, as the brigantine drifted to leeward, until we had about a hundred fathoms of line out, with our bag about that distance to windward.

"We soon found that the oil, exuding through the pores of the canvas, had a distinctly marked effect upon the sea, which ceased to break as soon as it reached the film of oil that had

oozed from the bag. Still the effect was by no means as great as he desired, the oil not exuding in sufficient quantity to render the sea safe for a boat, so we hauled our bag inboard again, punctured it well with a sailmaker's needle, and then tried it again. It now proved to be everything that could be desired; the oil oozed out of the bag in sufficient quantity to make a smooth patch of water with a diameter fully equal to the length of our ship; and, after testing the matter through the whole afternoon, we all came to the conclusion that our boats would live in such a patch, and that the experiment was quite worth trying. Wherefore three bags were made, one for each boat, and attached by a becket to a length of line measuring about twenty fathoms. Then, when night had set in, and the darkness had become deep enough to conceal our movements, the bags were filled and dropped overboard, the other end of the line being made fast to the ringbolt in the stern of the boat for the use of which it had been destined. A party of thirty men was told off—ten to each boat, with four additional to take the boat back to the ship in the event of our venture proving successful,—and the brigantine was then sailed to a position about a mile ahead and half-a-mile to windward of the *Manilla*; that being the ship that we had marked down for our prey. The great difficulty that we now anticipated was that of unhooking the falls with certainty and promptitude the moment that the boats should reach the water; but our captain provided for that by slinging the boats by strops and toggles attached to the ordinary fall-blocks. We were now all ready to put the matter to the test; but at the last moment the captain suddenly decided that it was too early, and that it would be better to defer the attempt until after midnight. This was done; and at the appointed hour the brigantine was once more sailed into a suitable position with regard to the *Manilla*; the boats were manned, lowered, and we managed to get away from the brigantine without much difficulty. She remained hove-to upon the spot where we had left her, and to make matters as safe as possible for us, capsized overboard the contents of two of the oil-barrels. This smoothened the sea to such an extent that, deeply as we were loaded, and heavily as it was blowing, we did not ship a drop of water. We allowed the boats to drift down to leeward, with their oil-bags towing astern, and with only two oars out, to keep them stern-on to the sea; and so accurately had our distance been calculated that when the *Manilla* came up abreast of us we only needed to pull a stroke or two to get comfortably under her lee. We boarded her by way of the lee channels, fore, main, and mizzen simultaneously; and that, let me tell you, was the most difficult part of our work, for the ship rolled so heavily that it was with the utmost difficulty we avoided staving or swamping

the boats. Each man knew, however, exactly what to do, and did it without the necessity for a word to be spoken; and thus our desperate adventure—for desperate indeed it was, let me tell you—was accomplished without mishap. Ah! there goes eight bells; time for me to turn in, so I will say good-night, *mon cher* Bowen, and pleasant dreams to you!"

Chapter Eleven.

The Manilla is struck by lightning.

For a full week nothing occurred of sufficient importance to be worthy of record; our little squadron making good headway before the fair wind that had come to our assistance; neither the brigantine nor the schooner ever being more than three or four miles distant from us; while, in response to daily invitations from Captain Chesney, the skipper of the Indiaman, Captain Winter frequently came on board to dine and spend the evening with the cuddy passengers. But on the ninth day after the recapture of the *Manilla*, the wind dwindled away to a light air, and then shifted out from the north-east, gradually freshening to a strong breeze, and breaking us off to an east-south-east course, close-hauled on the port tack. We stood thus all through the night; and at daybreak the next morning a large ship was discovered about ten miles to windward, close-hauled on the starboard tack, dodging along under topsails, jib, and spanker, with her courses in the brails. A single glance at her was sufficient to assure us that she was a man-o'-war—a frigate—on her cruising-ground; and that her people were broad awake was speedily made manifest, for we had scarcely made her out when she shifted her helm and bore up for us, letting fall her courses and setting her topgallant-sails and royals as she did so.

The discovery of this stranger was immediately productive of a very considerable amount of anxiety among us all, for she was a powerful vessel, and, if an enemy, likely to prove an exceedingly formidable antagonist. And there was very little doubt among us that she was an enemy; the cut of her square canvas being unmistakably French. Such was also Captain Winter's opinion; for he presently ran down under our stern and hailed me, stating his suspicions, and directing me to bear up and make the best of my way to leeward, while he and the *Dolphin* would endeavour to cover my retreat and distract the stranger's attention until I had got clear off. His orders were that I was to run to leeward until out of sight of the Frenchman,

and then to haul my wind on the starboard tack, when he would do his utmost to rejoin me; but that, in the event of his failing to do so, I was to make the best of my way home without wasting time in an endeavour to find him.

I lost no time in obeying his instructions, instantly wearing the Indiaman round and crowding sail to leeward. The frigate had by this time neared us to within seven miles; and the moment that we in the Indiaman bore up, she set studding-sails on both sides in pursuit, while the brigantine and the *Dolphin* stretched away to windward to intercept her. There was scarcely a shadow of doubt now in my mind that the stranger was a Frenchman; for although her studding-sails were set with a very commendable promptitude and alacrity, there was wanting in the operation a certain element of smartness, very difficult to describe, yet perfectly discernible to the eye of a seaman, which I have observed to be almost the exclusive attribute of the British man-o'-war. The difference, indeed, is so marked that, as in the present case, it has frequently been possible to decide the nationality of a ship merely by the way in which she is manoeuvred, and long before a sight of her bunting has been obtained. The conviction that the noble craft to windward was an enemy caused the greatest consternation on board the *Manilla*, particularly among the passengers; while even I, with all my knowledge of Captain Winter's indomitable courage, resource, and skill, could not but feel exceedingly anxious as to the result of his impending contest with so greatly superior a force. True, the memory of our gallant fight with and brilliant capture of the *Musette* frigate was still fresh in my memory; but I regarded that affair rather as a piece of exceptional good luck than as the result of superior gallantry on our part, and it was quite on the cards that in the present case luck might go over to the side of the enemy. As in the case of the *Musette*, a fortunate shot might make all the difference between victory and defeat, and it was too much to expect that such good fortune as had then attended us would always be ours. Be it understood, I was in nowise fearful of personal capture. I felt pretty confident that the skipper would be quite able to occupy the attention of the frigate long enough to enable the *Manilla* to make good her escape; but, that accomplished, would he be able also to save himself? Moved by so keen a feeling of anxiety as I have indicated, it will not be wondered at that I had no sooner got the Indiaman before the wind, with every stitch of canvas spread that I could pack upon her, than I devoted my whole attention to the movements of the three craft which were about to take part in the forthcoming ocean-drama.

There was no outward sign of any hesitancy or doubt whatever in the movements of either vessel. The frigate had borne away into our wake the moment that we had borne away, and was now foaming along after us in gallant style, with studding-sails set on both sides, from the royals down; and was of course coming up with us, hand over hand. There was no question as to her intentions; she was after us, and meant to catch us if she could. On the other hand, the brigantine and schooner, under all plain sail, were stretching away to windward, close-hauled on the larboard tack, with a space of only a hundred fathoms or so dividing them, the brigantine leading. It looked as though the two vessels were about to engage the frigate on the same side, which,—if it was to be a running fight, as seemed probable,—was sound judgment on Captain Winter's part, since it would enable the frigate to use only one broadside, and so virtually reduce her weight of metal by one-half. The two craft continued to stand on this tack until the frigate was nearly abreast of them, when they hove about at the same moment, and simultaneously hoisted their colours. The frigate probably hoisted her colours in reply to this challenge, but, if so, we could not see what they were, her own canvas intervening to hide the flag from us; but she fired her whole broadside a few seconds later, and we saw the shot spouting up the water as they flew toward the two craft which dared to dispute the passage of the sea with her. They appeared to fall short; at all events no perceptible damage was done to either vessel; but a moment later the schooner fired, and the sound of the report told me that it was her long eighteen-pounder that was speaking. The shot struck the water about sixty or seventy fathoms from the frigate, ricocheted, and appeared to pass over her, for presently we saw the water spout up again well to starboard of the vessel. This was enough for the saucy little *Dolphin*; she was beyond the range of the frigate's guns, but could reach her antagonist with her own Long Tom. She therefore immediately bore up, set her square-sail and studding-sails, and, maintaining her distance, steered a parallel course to that of the frigate, while the brigantine stood on, with the now evident intention of taking up a raking position athwart the frigate's stern.

The *Dolphin* now opened a rapid fire upon the frigate with her long gun, and every shot showed that the latter was well within range. The frigate replied from time to time with single guns, but Comben was too wary to approach near enough to be hit, and so the fight went on for some time, with no apparent damage to either combatant. Meanwhile, the brigantine had, as I had anticipated, placed herself athwart the frigate's stern, well

within range, and now traversed the Frenchman's wake, sailing to-and-fro athwart his stern, pouring in a whole raking broadside every time she crossed it, and receiving but two guns in reply. All this, of course, was exceedingly pretty and interesting as an exhibition of Captain Winter's skill and acumen in fighting an enemy of superior force; but thus far the firing had been comparatively ineffective, a few holes here and there in the Frenchman's sails being the only visible result of the expenditure of a considerable quantity of gunpowder, while he had neared us to within four miles, and was overhauling us so rapidly that another hour, at most, would see us within reach of his guns.

Mason, however—the man who had formerly proved himself to be so excellent a shot with the eighteen-pounder,—was still aboard the schooner, and I had great hopes of him, especially as I knew that he would be by this time upon his mettle and animated by a feeling that it behoved him to speedily do something remarkable if he would save his reputation. Nor was I deceived in my expectations of him; for, very shortly afterwards, a shot from the schooner cut the halliard of the frigate's larboard lower studding-sail, and the sail dropped into the water, retarding the vessel's progress perceptibly until it was got in. It occupied the Frenchmen nearly a quarter of an hour to accomplish this, to splice the halliard, and to reset the sail. Meanwhile the brigantine had not been idle; and even while the Frenchmen were busy about their studding-sail, she recrossed the frigate's stern, firing another broadside at that vessel's spars, with considerable success, it appeared; for although we could not make out exactly what had happened it was evident that something had gone seriously wrong, Captain Chesney—who stood beside me, watching the fight—declaring that he had noticed an appearance strongly suggestive of the fall of the frigate's mizzen-mast. I hardly believed that such could be the case, for, steering as the frigate then was, dead before the wind, had her mizzen-mast fallen, it would have fallen forward, doing so much damage to the spars and sails on the mainmast that I think the effect would have been recognisable even where we were. I considered it far more probable that the mizzen-topmast or topgallant-mast had been shot away. The next shot from the schooner, however, was an exceedingly lucky one; it appeared to strike the frigate's fore-topmast about six feet below the cross-trees, and the next moment the whole of the wreck was hanging by the topsail-sheets from the fore-yard down on to the ship's forecastle, with her jibs and fore-topmast-staysail towing under her bows. This at once caused her to broach-to, and settled her business, so

far as any hope of capturing us was concerned; but she had her revenge by pouring the whole of her starboard broadside into the brigantine, the sails and rigging of which were tremendously cut up by the unexpected salute. And as the frigate broached-to we saw that my surmise was not very far wide of the mark, her mizzen-topgallant-mast and mizzen-topsail yard having been shot away, the latter in the slings.

The three vessels now went at it, hammer and tongs, the brigantine being for the moment fairly under the frigate's guns. But Winter soon very cleverly got himself out of this awkward situation, and,—while the Frenchmen were busily engaged in an endeavour to clear away the wreck and get their ship once more before the wind,—laid himself athwart their bows and, with his topsail aback, poured broadside after broadside into the helpless craft; while the *Dolphin*, gliding hither and thither, beyond the reach of the frigate's guns, sent home an eighteen-pound shot every two or three minutes, every one of which appeared to tell somewhere or other on the Frenchman's hull. We now ran away from them, fast, however, and by noon had lost sight of them altogether. But, when last seen, they were still hammering away at each other, the brigantine and schooner appearing to be getting rather the best of it.

Once fairly out of sight of the combatants, we took in our studding-sails, and hauled our wind to the northward, in obedience to Captain Winter's orders; and although I had a sharp look-out for the *Dolphin* and her consort maintained throughout the whole of the next day, I was not greatly surprised at their not heaving in sight. I had not much misgiving as to the ultimate result of the fight; but I believed that the brigantine at least would not get off without a rather severe mauling, in which case the schooner would naturally stand by her until she could be again put into decent workable trim.

The fourth day after the fight dawned without bringing us a sight of our consorts, and I then began to feel rather uneasy; fearing that they had probably missed us, somehow, and that we should have to make our way home as best we could, unprotected; and to enter the English Channel just then, unprotected, meant almost certain capture. For although the Indiaman was certainly armed, after a fashion, most of her guns were "quakers", while the others—ten in all—were only six-pounders; and it would need the whole of her crew to work her only, under her awkward jury-rig, with no one to spare for fighting. However, it was useless to meet trouble half-way; so I determined to plod steadily onward and homeward, hoping for

the best. Hitherto, ever since the day of our meeting with the Frenchman, we had experienced moderate but steady breezes from the northward and eastward, but on the day of which I am now writing there were indications of an impending change. The wind gradually died down to a light, fitful air that came in flaws, first from one quarter of the compass and then from another, lasting but a few minutes, with lengthening intervals of calm between them, while huge piles of black, thunderous-looking cloud gradually heaped up along the northern horizon until they had overspread the whole sky. The barometer, too, exhibited a tendency to fall; but the decline was so slight that I was of opinion it meant no more than perhaps a sharp thunder-squall, particularly as there was no swell making; moreover there was a close, thundery feeling in the stagnating air, which increased as the day grew older. It was not, however, until about an hour after sunset, and just as we were sitting down to dinner in the cuddy, that the outbreak commenced; which it did with a sudden, blinding flash of lightning that darted out of the welkin almost immediately overhead, instantly followed by a deafening crash of thunder that caused the Indiaman to tremble to her keel; the sensation being not unlike what one would expect to feel if the craft were being swept rapidly along over a sandy bottom which she just touched.

This first flash was soon followed by another, not quite so near at hand, then by another, and another, and another, until the lightning was playing all about us in such rapidly succeeding flashes that the whole atmosphere was luminous with a continuous quivering of ghastly blue-green light, while the heavens resounded and the ship trembled with the unbroken crash and roll of the thunder. The spectacle was magnificent, but it was also rather trying to the nerves; the lightning being so dazzlingly vivid that it was positively blinding, while I had never heard such awful thunder before, even in the West Indies. Several of the lady passengers, indeed, were so unnerved by the storm that they retreated from the table and shut themselves into their cabins. Even young Dumaresq, who had hitherto appeared to be irrepressible, was subdued by the awful violence of the turmoil that raged around us. He was admitting something to this effect to me when he was cut short by a blaze of lightning that seemed to envelop the whole ship in a sheet of flame; there was a rending shock, violent enough to suggest that the Indiaman had come into violent collision with another vessel—although we were fully aware that such a thing could not be, the weather at the moment being stark calm,—the hot air seemed to suddenly become surcharged with a strong sulphurous smell; and then came a peal of thunder of so terrific

and soul-subduing a character that it might have been the crash of a shattered world. For a brief space we were all so thoroughly overpowered, so awed and overwhelmed by this tremendous manifestation of the Creator's power that we remained speechless and motionless on our seats; then, as the echo of the thunder rumbled away into the distance, and our hearing gradually recovered from the shock of that last dreadful detonation, we became aware of loud shrieks of pain out on deck, a brilliant light, a confused rush and scurry of feet, and shouts of:

"Fire! fire! The ship's been struck, and is all ablaze!"

At the cry, Captain Chesney, Dumaresq, and I sprang to our feet and dashed out on deck. Merciful Heaven! what an appalling scene met our gaze! The foremast had been struck, and was cloven in twain from the jury topgallant-mast-head to the deck; it had also been set on fire, and the blazing mass of timber, cordage, and canvas had fallen back upon the mainmast, setting the sails and rigging of that mast also on fire; the flames blazing fiercely as they writhed and coiled about the spars and darted hither and thither, like fiery serpents, through the mazes of the tarred and highly inflammable rigging. But that was by no means the worst of it. The lightning, upon reaching the deck, appeared to have darted hither and thither in the most extraordinary way, for we presently discovered that a considerable quantity of metal-work, such as iron bands, belaying-pins, bolts, the chain topsail-sheets, and other such matters had been either wholly or partially fused by the terrific heat of the electric discharge; while several silent, prostrate figures on the deck, scorched black, and with their clothing burnt from their bodies, told that death had been busy in that awful instant when the bolt had struck the ship. But there was worse even than that; for there were other figures crouched and huddled upon the deck, moaning piteously with pain; and one man stood erect, with his hands clasped over his eyes, and his head thrown back, shrieking to be taken below, for he had been struck blind!

It was a dreadful moment; a moment of frightful peril, and of horror indescribable; a moment when a man might well be excused if he found himself temporarily overmastered by the accumulated terrors of his surroundings; but Chesney, the captain of the Indiaman, proved equal to the occasion. For a single instant he stood aghast at the awful spectacle that met his horrified gaze; then he pulled himself together and, instinctively assuming the command—as, under the

circumstances, he was perfectly justified in doing,—he made his voice ring from end to end of the ship as he ordered all hands to be called. The order, however, was scarcely necessary, for by this time the watch below—startled by the shock of the lightning-stroke, the shrieks of the injured, and that indefinable conviction of something being wrong that occasionally seizes people upon the occurrence of some dire catastrophe—were tumbling up through the fore-scuttle with much of the hurry and confusion of panic, which was greatly increased when they beheld the masts, sails, and rigging all ablaze. By voice and example, however, we presently contrived to steady them and get them under control; and then, while one gang was told off to convey the injured men below—Dumaresq meanwhile hurrying away to summon the doctor, who was busily engaged in the cabin, endeavouring to soothe some of the lady passengers, who were in hysterics,—the rest of the crew were set to work to rig the pumps, muster the buckets, and pass along the hose. In a few minutes all was ready, the pumps were started, and the chief mate, with a line to which the end of the hose was bent, climbed up into the main-top, from which he began to play upon the fire. But by this time the flames had acquired such a firm hold upon the spars, canvas, and heavily tarred rigging that the jet of water from the hose proved quite incapable of producing any visible effect whatever upon them; and the mate himself soon became so hemmed in by the fire that he was in the very act of retreating to the deck when the flood-gates of heaven were opened, and the rain suddenly pelted down in such overwhelming torrents that in less than five minutes the conflagration aloft was completely extinguished; but not until the sails had been burnt to tinder, the spars badly charred, and most of the standing and running rigging destroyed.

With the outburst of rain that had rendered us such excellent service the violence of the storm sensibly abated, perhaps because it had nearly spent itself; at all events the lightning discharges now succeeded each other at steadily lengthening intervals as the storm passed away to the southward, the thunder died down to a distant booming and rumbling, and finally ceased altogether in about an hour and a half from the commencement of the outbreak, while the lightning became a harmless, fitful quivering of vari-coloured light along the southern horizon.

But we were now in a most awkward predicament; a predicament that might easily become disastrous should it come on to blow, as was by no means impossible. For not only had

three men been killed outright and eight more or less seriously injured by that terrible lightning-stroke, but our sails were gone, our foremast destroyed, and our rigging so badly injured that our main and mizzen-masts stood practically unsupported; while we had too much reason to fear that the masts and spars themselves were so seriously weakened by the play of the flames upon them as to have become of little or no use to us. And, to crown all, it was now so pitch-dark that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the full extent of our disaster until daylight. Our situation, however, was too critical to admit of our waiting until then; it was of vital importance that immediate steps should be taken to secure what had been left to us; and, with this object, the carpenter and boatswain procured lanterns with which they proceeded aloft to make a critical examination into the condition of the spars and rigging. They were thus engaged when the doctor, who had been down in the forecastle, attending to the hurts of the wounded men, appeared on deck, and, catching sight of Captain Chesney and myself standing together under the break of the poop, beckoned us to follow him into his cabin.

Chapter Twelve.

The destruction of the Manilla.

"I will only detain you a moment, gentlemen," said the medico, as he closed the cabin door behind us; "but I wanted to speak to you strictly in private; since, if overheard, what I have to say might possibly produce a panic. The fact is that I am afraid we are not yet aware of the full extent of the disaster that has happened to us. I have been down in the forecastle attending to the wounded men; and I had no sooner entered the place than I noticed a faint smell as of burning; but I attached no importance to it at the moment, believing that it arose from the fire on deck. But, instead of passing away, as it ought to have done, with the extinguishment of the fire, it has persistently continued; and I am almost inclined to believe that it is now, if anything, rather stronger than it was when I went below. Do you think it possible that the ship's cargo is on fire?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the skipper; "I never thought of that. It shall be looked to at once. I am much obliged to you, Doctor, for mentioning the matter; and should have been even more so if you had communicated with me rather earlier. Come along, Bowen; we must investigate without further delay."

The doctor hurriedly entered into an explanation to the effect that he could not leave his patients until they had been properly attended to, and that there was no one by whom he could send a message; but we could just then ill spare the time to listen to him; so, with a hasty acceptance of his excuses, the skipper led the way out on deck, I following.

We made our way straight to the fore-castle, into which we forthwith descended; and, sure enough, we were no sooner fairly below the coamings of the hatchway than we became aware of a distinct smell of fire, to which also one of the less seriously injured of the wounded men immediately directed our attention. We sniffed about, hither and thither, and soon found that the smell was stronger as we stooped nearer to the deck, or approached the bulkhead dividing the fore-hold from the fore-castle. It was now almost certain that there was a smouldering of something somewhere below; and without more ado the skipper flung off his coat, lifted the hatch of the forepeak, and descended. He remained below about five minutes; and when he reappeared he composedly closed the hatch, resumed his coat, and beckoned me to follow him on deck. The crew were now busily engaged, under the direction of the chief and second mates, in clearing away the wreck of the foremast; we therefore walked aft until we were out of hearing of everybody; when the captain paused, and, turning to me, said:

"I am very much afraid that the ship is on fire, but I cannot be sure. The smell is distinctly stronger in the forepeak than it is in the fore-castle, yet not strong enough to lead to the belief that it is anything serious. Still, it must be attended to at once. So I shall knock off the men, call them aft, and speak to them before doing anything, or we shall have a panic among them. Then I shall have the fore-hatch opened, and proceed to make a proper examination of the cargo. Mr Priest," he continued, calling to the chief mate, "knock the men off for a minute or two, and send them aft, if you please."

The mate, marvelling, no doubt, at this untimely interruption of an operation of great importance, did as he was bid, and in a few minutes all hands, except the injured men, were mustered in the waist, waiting to hear what the skipper had to say to them. As soon as silence had been secured, Captain Chesney advanced and said:

"My lads, I have sent for you to come aft in order that I may communicate to you a matter that may prove of very considerable consequence to us all, and to invite your best

assistance and co-operation in an investigation that I am about to cause to be made. The matter in question may or may not prove to be of an alarming character; but, in case of its turning out to be the latter, I want to impress upon you all the paramount importance of order, method, and the most implicit obedience, without which nothing of real importance can ever be achieved. There is at critical moments an impulse in every man to think and act independently, under the conviction that no one is so capable as himself of dealing efficiently and effectually with the matter in hand, and when this impulse prevails confusion and disorder follow, and all useful effort is frustrated. Where a number of men are working jointly together there must be a leader—one who will think for and direct the efforts of the rest, and it is essential to success that the orders of that leader should be obeyed. Now, in the present case, my lads, I will do all the thinking and planning and arranging, and if you will do the work quietly, methodically, and steadily there is no reason why all should not be well.

"I have said all this with a double purpose: first, to prepare you for rather serious news; and, second, to quiet and steady you for the work which lies before us. And, first, as to the news. I fear that the lightning has done us rather more damage than we have hitherto had reason to suppose. In a word, men, I fear that it has set the cargo on fire—steady, lads, steady; I only say I fear that such is the case; I am by no means certain of it. But it is necessary that the matter should be investigated forthwith; I am, therefore, about to have the fore-hatch lifted and the cargo examined. Mr Priest, you, with your watch, will take off the hatches and rouse the cargo up on deck; and you, Mr Simcoe, with the starboard watch, will muster the buckets again, rig the pumps, and lead along the hose ready to play upon the fire, should such be discovered. Away, all of you, to your duty."

It may possibly be thought by the reader that the above was rather a long speech for a man to make at a time when he believed the ship to be on fire under his feet, and when moments were consequently precious; but, after all, the delay amounted to only some three minutes, and those three minutes were well spent, for the skipper's speech had the effect of steadying the men, subduing any tendency to panic among them, and rendering them amenable to that strict discipline which is of such inestimable value and importance in the presence of great emergencies. They went away to their work in as quiet and orderly a manner as though they had been dismissed below.

The wedges were quickly knocked out, the battens removed, the tarpaulin stripped off, the hatches lifted, and the upper tier of cargo disclosed, with the result that almost immediately a thin wreath of pale-brown smoke began to stream up from between the bales and cases.

"No mistake about that, sir," observed the chief mate to the skipper, pointing to the curling smoke wreaths; "there's fire somewhere down there. Now, lads, let's get down to it, and make short work of it. You, Jim, and Simpson, get to work, and break out that bale and as much else as you can get at, and rouse it out on deck. Chips! ... Where's the carpenter?"

"Here I are, Mr Priest," answered the carpenter, emerging from the forecastle hatchway after having stowed away his mawl again in the most methodical manner.

"That's right," observed the mate. "Now, Chips, our foremast having gone, we want a derrick or a pair of sheers over this hatchway to help us in breaking out the cargo. Find a spar, or something that will serve our purpose, and let the bo'sun rig up what we want. Well done, men; now, out with that crate; jump down into that hole, one or two of you, and lend the others a hand."

The work went forward rapidly and steadily, and in a very short time there was a goodly display of cargo on the deck about the fore-hatch. The smoke, however, which at first had streamed up in a mere thread-like wreath, was now pouring out of the hatch in a cloud so dense that the men working at the cargo were obliged to be relieved every three or four minutes to avoid suffocation. The business was beginning to assume a very serious aspect. And now, too, the storm having passed off, the passengers had ventured out on deck once more, and, observing the lights and the bustle forward, had gradually approached the fore end of the ship to see what was going on. The skipper, however, at once ordered them aft again, and, following them into the cuddy, explained just how matters stood, remaining with them until their excitement had subsided and he had got them pretty well in hand.

Hitherto no water had been used, Captain Chesney being anxious to get as much of the cargo as possible—which was mostly of a valuable character—out on deck uninjured; but the rapidly increasing density and volume of the smoke showed that the question of damaging the cargo had now become a secondary one. The safety of the ship herself was imperilled, and the head pump was accordingly manned, the hose coupled

up, and the second mate pointed it down the hatchway, while the third mate superintended the operations of a party of men who had been set to draw water and pass along a chain of buckets by hand. But when water had been pouring continuously down the hatchway for fully a quarter of an hour, and the smoke continued to stream up from below in ever-increasing volume, unmingled with any indication of steam, it became apparent that the seat of the fire was at some distance, for the water had evidently not yet reached the flames. Nevertheless, the men worked steadily on; but whereas at the commencement of their labours they had sung out their "Yo-ho's" and "Heave-ho's", and other encouraging exclamations, after the manner of sailors engaged in arduous labour, they now toiled on in grim silence.

At length a feathery jet of white vapour began to mingle with the thick column of smoke surging up the hatchway, and was immediately greeted with a shout of triumph by the mate, followed by a few crisp ejaculations of encouragement to the men, who apparently accepted the same in good faith. Nevertheless, I could see by Priest's face that, although he might have deceived the men, he had not deceived himself, and that he knew, as well as I did, that the appearance of steam was an indication, not that the water had reached the fire, but that the fire had spread sufficiently to reach the water, a very different and much more serious matter.

Suddenly the smoke thickened into a dense black cloud of a pungent, waxy odour, and immediately afterwards bright tongues of flame came darting up between the bales and packages upon which the men in the hold were working. There was a loud, hissing sound, as the water that was being poured down the hatchway became converted into steam, and then, with a quick, unexpected roar of fire, the flames shot up in such fierce volume that the men were driven precipitately up on deck.

"Ah!" ejaculated the mate in an aside to me; "I know what that is; and it's what I've been fearing. There's a lot of shellac and gums of different sorts down there, and the fire's got at 'em. They'll burn like oil, or worse, and I'm afraid we shall have our work cut out now to get the fire under."

I fully agreed with him, or rather I began to entertain a suspicion that the ship was doomed, for the heat, even while the mate had been speaking, had grown intense. The whole contents of the hatchway had burst into flame, and the ruddy tongues of fire were now darting through the hatchway, as

through a chimney, to a height of fully twenty feet above the deck. The coamings were on fire, the pitch was beginning to bubble and boil out of the seams of the deck planking, and the planks themselves were already uncomfortably hot to stand upon. Unless the fire could somehow be checked it seemed to me that it would soon be time to think about getting out the boats.

The skipper meanwhile had come forward again, and, although looking very anxious, was, I was glad to see, perfectly self-possessed.

"We shall have to clap the hatches on again, Mr Priest, and endeavour to smother the fire," said he. "Let it be done at once."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Priest. "Now then, lads, on with the hatches some of you. Shall the carpenter cut holes in the deck, sir, for the water to pass through?"

"Yes," answered the skipper. "We must keep the hose going, certainly."

But when the men came to attempt the replacing of the hatches, it was found that the fire was already too much for them. The heat was so fierce, and the flames poured forth so continuously, that they could not get near enough to the hatchway to achieve their object. Then the skipper and I made the attempt, with no better success, getting severely scorched for our pains.

"Perhaps," said I, "it might be possible to do something with a wetted sail—"

"An excellent suggestion, for which I am much obliged to you, Mr Bowen!" exclaimed the skipper, interrupting me. "It shall be tried at once."

And he forthwith gave the necessary orders.

A main-topgallant-sail was got up out of the sail-room and dropped overboard, made fast by a line to one of the clews. Then, as soon as it was thoroughly saturated, it was dragged inboard, stretched athwart the deck, and dragged over the flaming hatchway, several men holding it in position while the carpenter rapidly spiked the head and foot of it to the deck. Meanwhile, the hose was played incessantly upon it, while bucket after bucket of water was emptied into it with frantic

energy until the hollow of it over the hatchway was full of water. By keeping a continuous stream of water pouring into this hollow we seemed to check the fire for a time, although it was difficult work, on account of the great clouds of scalding steam that soon began to rise from the water. But in less than a quarter of an hour the scorched canvas gave way. The water that it had contained plumped down through the rent on to the blazing cargo, and was immediately converted into a vast volume of steam that momentarily checked the fire, and then the flames leaped up again far more fiercely than ever.

"It is no good," murmured the skipper, turning to me; "the ship is doomed! The fire is rapidly spreading in spite of all that we can do. There is nothing for it, therefore, but to take to the boats, and the sooner that they are in the water the better."

This was quite my own opinion, and I said so. The chief mate was accordingly called aside and given his instructions, and while the second mate, with his gang, continued to fight the fire, Mr Priest, with a few picked men, went to work to provision and water the several boats preparatory to getting them into the water. The long-boat was an exception to this arrangement. She stood on chocks upon the top of the main hatch, and, under ordinary circumstances, was hoisted out by means of yard tackles on the fore and main-yard-arms. Now, however, that the foremast was destroyed, it was no longer possible to handle her in this way, and the only plan that suggested itself was to launch her bodily off the deck, afterwards bailing out such water as she would probably ship during the operation. This was accordingly done very successfully, and in about two hours' time all the boats were alongside, with oars, rowlocks, a baler each, masts, sails, and other gear complete, and as much provisions and water as there was room for after allowing space for the necessary complement of passengers and crew. The Indiaman was well provided with boats, so there was room for everybody without overcrowding.

While these preparations had been going on, Captain Chesney had been in the cuddy, stating the condition of affairs to the passengers, and directing them to prepare for their forthcoming boat-voyage by dressing in their warmest clothing and providing themselves with such extra wraps as would be useful at night or during severe weather. He also permitted them to each take a small package of valuables with them, explaining at the same time that they must be prepared to throw these overboard should the boats prove to be dangerously deep in the water, or should bad weather come on.

At length, all being ready, the process of embarkation in the boats began, both gangways being used for this purpose. First of all, the crew of the long-boat and the first cutter descended into their respective boats, and stood by to receive the other occupants. The long-boat was a particularly fine and roomy craft, with accommodation enough to take all the women and children in her, and these were now accordingly ushered down the accommodation ladder, each being called by name by the skipper, who stood at the gangway with a list in his hand, which he ticked off by the light of the flames as each person left the ship. This was at the starboard gangway. Meanwhile Simcoe, the second mate, at the port gangway, was receiving the men who had been injured by the lightning that had set the ship on fire. All these were taken into the second cutter, and her full complement was made up with bachelor passengers. As soon as these two boats had received their full number they were ordered to pull away from the ship far enough to allow two other boats to come to the gangway, which in like manner quickly received their human freight, and hauled off. And so the work went on until everybody but the skipper and myself had left the ship, the gig, with eight hands, being at the gangway to receive us. The whole of the fore part of the ship, to within a few feet of the main hatchway, was by this time a roaring and blazing fiery furnace, the flames of which reached as high as the main-topmast-head. Part of the fore deck had fallen in; the heel of the bowsprit had been consumed, causing the spar, with all attached, to plunge into the water under the bows, and the deck planking, as far aft as the gangway, was almost unendurably hot to stand upon, while small tongues of flame were constantly springing into existence here and there about us in the most extraordinary way as the timber ignited with the intense heat. There was consequently not a moment to lose, and, as Captain Chesney very rightly insisted upon being the last to leave the ship, I wasted no time in making my way down into the gig, which I was to command, and into which I had already passed my few traps and my sextant. The skipper, meanwhile, had gone into the cuddy to take a final look round. He was absent nearly five minutes, and I was growing so anxious about him that I was at the point of leaving the boat again to hunt him up, when he appeared at the head of the gangway. The poor fellow seemed to be dreadfully cut up as he allowed his glances to wander fore and aft the noble ship, now ablaze almost to the spot upon which he stood, and with thick jets of black smoke and little tongues of flame forcing their way through the seams at a hundred different points. He had commanded the vessel ever since she left the stocks; he had conducted her safely to-and-fro over thousands of miles of

ocean, through fair weather and foul; he had studied her until he had come to know every quality that she possessed, good or bad; had taken pride in the first, and found ample excuses for the last; he had grown to love her, almost as a man loves his wife or child, and now the moment had come when he must abandon her to the devouring flames that had already seared and destroyed her beauty, and were fast reducing her to a charred, shapeless shell of blazing timber. Involuntarily, as it seemed to me, he doffed his cap, as a man might do in the presence of the dying, standing there in the gangway, with his figure in bold relief against the glowing furnace of flame and the dense volumes of heavy, wreathing, fire-illuminated smoke, while his eyes seemed to wander hither and thither about the burning ship as though unable to drag himself away; but at length the fire burst through the deck close to where he stood. Fiery flakes were falling thickly about him; the mainmast was tottering ominously; it was obviously full time to be gone. Such hints were not to be ignored, and replacing his cap upon his head with one hand as he dashed the other across his eyes, he slowly descended the ladder and gave the word to shove off. The men, who had latterly been growing very anxious and fidgety, lost no time in obeying the order. But we were none too soon, for the gig had barely left the gangway when the mainmast fell over the side with a loud crash and a fierce up-darting of millions of fiery sparks, followed by a great spout of flame that seemed to indicate that the mast, in falling, had torn up a considerable portion of the deck. The poor skipper, who had sunk down beside me in the stern-sheets of the boat, shuddered violently and heaved a heavy, gasping sigh as the mainmast struck the water close under the boat's stern, raising a splash that nearly drenched us to the skin.

"Another half-minute and I should have been too late," he murmured, with a ghastly smile. "Well," he continued, "so far as the poor old ship is concerned, my duty is done. But there is still a heavy responsibility resting upon me, inasmuch as that the lives of all these people depend almost exclusively upon my judgment and foresight. Put me aboard the long-boat, please."

Chapter Thirteen.

The gig is caught in a gale.

Did as the skipper had requested, receiving young Dumaresq into the gig in his place, and then the several boats lay upon their oars, awaiting further orders.

Captain Chesney seemed to be very reluctant, even now, to quit the neighbourhood of the burning ship; and therein I considered that he was displaying sound judgment, for the weather was still stark calm, and whatever movement we might make would have to be executed with the oars, which would soon result in greatly fatiguing the men without any commensurate advantage. Moreover the Indiaman was now a blazing beacon, the light from which would be distinctly visible at a distance of at least thirty or forty miles in every direction, and would be sure to attract attention should any craft be in the neighbourhood, probably leading to her steering in our direction as soon as a breeze should spring up; in which case we might all hope to be picked up.

That this was in his mind was evident, for he presently summoned all the boats about him, and pointed out to their occupants the possibilities of rescue by remaining in the neighbourhood of the burning ship, and he then went on to say:

"Our reckoning at noon showed that we were then—as we have since remained—seven hundred and twenty miles south-west by south from the island of Corvo, one of the Azores, which is the nearest land. There is a small town called Rosario upon this island, where, if we can but reach it, I have no doubt we can obtain succour; and I therefore intend to steer for Corvo, not only for the reason that I have mentioned, but also because most homeward-bound ships endeavour to make the Azores, and we therefore stand a very good chance of being picked up at any moment. Now, gentlemen, those of you who are in charge of boats will be pleased to remember that the course is north-east by north, and the distance seven hundred and twenty miles. You will also be pleased to remember that the boats are to keep company as long as the weather will permit, unless otherwise ordered by me. And now, as I do not intend to make a start until to-morrow morning, you had better arrange the watches in each boat, and secure all the rest that you can."

This very sensible recommendation was at once adopted all round; but, as far as the gig was concerned, sleep appeared to be out of the question, the strong glare of light from the burning ship—although the boats had hauled off to a distance of fully half a mile from her—and, still more, the novelty and excitement of our situation, seeming to have completely banished slumber from our eyelids.

At length, toward two o'clock in the morning—by which time the Indiaman had become the mere shell of a ship, a blazing furnace from stem to stern,—a light breeze sprang up from the north-north-east, almost dead in our teeth for the voyage to the Azores; and the order was passed along for the boats to set their sails and make short reaches, for the purpose of maintaining their position near the ship. This was done, and then the only bad quality that the boats appeared to possess rapidly declared itself. They were, one and all, staunch, well-built, and finely-modelled boats, excellently adapted for their work in all respects save one, which, in the present case, was of very great importance: their keels were so shallow that they had no grip of the water; and the result of this was that, as we quickly discovered, they would not turn to windward. The gig, which had been built with an especial eye to speed, was the least serious offender in this respect; indeed, so long as the water remained smooth, we managed to hold our own with her, and a trifle to spare; the long-boat, probably from her size and superior depth of body, came next; but the others sagged away to leeward from the first, despite the utmost efforts of those in charge; and, consequently, in order to remain in company, we were obliged to bear up and run down to them. Within an hour from the moment of making sail we were a mile to leeward of the ship; and with the steady freshening of the breeze we continued to increase our distance from her.

The day at length broke, disclosing a sea ruffled to a hue of purest sapphire, flecked with little ridges of snowy foam by the whipping of the now fresh breeze, under a sky of blue, dappled with small, wool-like white clouds that came sailing up, squadron after squadron, out of the north-east, at a speed that told of a fiery breeze in the higher reaches of the atmosphere; and a sharp look-out for the gleaming canvas of a passing ship was at once instituted, but without result. About half an hour later the skipper, who was but a short distance to leeward of us, waved us to close; and when we had done so the long-boat and the gig ran down in company to the other boats in succession, Captain Chesney ordering each, as we passed, to follow him, until we finally all found ourselves near the jolly-boat, which was the most leewardly boat of all. The little flotilla then closed round the long-boat, which had been hove-to, and the skipper, standing up in the stern-sheets, addressed us:

"Gentlemen," said he, "it is, as you may well imagine, a great disappointment to me to discover that the boats exhibit such very poor weatherly qualities, since it renders it plain that, unless something can be done to improve them in that respect,

it will be useless for us to think of carrying out my original plan of making for the Azores in the teeth of the present foul wind. A plan has occurred to me that may possibly have the effect of helping the boats to go to windward, and I should like you all to try it. If it answers, well and good; if it does not, I am afraid there will be nothing for it but for us to try for the Canaries, which are considerably further away from us than the Azores, but which also lie much further to the southward, and consequently afford us a better chance, with the wind as it now is.

"And now as to my plan for helping the boats to turn to windward. They are all fitted with bottom-boards; and I am of opinion that, if the triangular bottom-board in the stern-sheets is suspended over the lee side amidships by means of short lengths of line bent on to two of the corners, the arrangement will serve as a lee-board, and the boats will go to windward, although their speed may be slightly decreased. At all events I should like to give the plan a trial; so get your bottom-boards rigged at once, gentlemen, if you please, somewhat after the fashion of this affair that I have arranged."

So saying, the skipper exhibited the long-boat's board, fitted to serve as a lee-board, and forthwith dropped it over the side, secured by a couple of stout lanyards, the other ends of which were made fast to the boat's thwarts. It appeared to require but little arranging, the leeway of the boat pressing it close to her side, and retaining it there in its proper position. The other boats were not long in following the skipper's example. Five minutes sufficed to get the lee-boards into action, and then the squadron hauled its wind, with the object of beating back to the neighbourhood of the ship. The value of Captain Chesney's idea soon became apparent, for in less than an hour we had reached far enough to windward to enable us to fetch the ship on the next tack. But we did not go about; for just at that time the wreck, burnt to the water's edge, suddenly disappeared, leaving no trace of her late presence but a dense cloud of mingled steam and smoke, that gradually swept away to leeward astern of us.

The boats were on the starboard tack, and were kept so throughout the day, that being the leg upon which we could do best with the wind as it then was; and at noon an observation of the sun was secured which, the skipper having his chronometer and charts with him, showed that we were eleven miles nearer to our destination than we had been when we left the ship. This was no great slice out of a distance of more than

seven hundred miles, but neither was it by any means discouraging, taking into consideration the distance that we had lost during the night. As for the passengers, particularly the women and children, they were in wonderfully good spirits, seeming to regard the boat-voyage rather as a pleasure-trip than the serious matter that it really was. The breeze continuing to freshen, it at length became necessary for the long-boat and ourselves to haul down a reef, in order that we might not outsail and run away from the remainder of the flotilla. But, despite everybody's most strenuous efforts, the boats manifested a decided disposition to become widely scattered, and it was only by the faster sailers heaving-to occasionally that the sluggards were enabled to keep in company. This proved so serious an obstacle to progress that just before sunset the long-boat again displayed the signal to close, and when we had done so the skipper informed us that, in view of the great difference in the sailing powers of the several boats, he withdrew his prohibition as to parting company, and that from that moment each boat would be at liberty to do the best that she could for herself. And it appeared to me that this was a most sensible decision to arrive at, since, taking into account the long distance to be traversed, the determination to regulate the progress of the entire squadron by that of the slowest boat must necessarily entail a very serious lengthening of the period of exposure and privation for those in the faster boats. Sail was accordingly made by the long-boat and ourselves; and when darkness closed down upon the scene, the gig was leading by about half a mile, the long-boat coming next, and the remainder stringing out astern, at distances varying from three-quarters of a mile to twice as far.

It must not be supposed that, on this first day in the boats, the novelty of our situation caused us to feel indifferent to the possibility of a sail heaving in sight; on the contrary, one man in each boat was told off for the especial purpose of keeping a look-out; and I, for one, felt it to be a serious misfortune that up to nightfall nothing had been sighted; for, to tell the whole truth, I regarded the possibility of our reaching either Corvo or the Canaries as mighty problematical, trusting for our eventual rescue very much more to the chance of our falling in with a ship and being picked up.

About eight bells of the second dog-watch the wind, which had been gradually freshening all day, freshened still more, piping up occasionally in so squally a fashion that I deemed it prudent to again haul down a reef; and by midnight it had become necessary to take in a second reef, the sky having clouded over,

with a thick and rather dirty look to windward, while the wind came along in such heavy puffs that, staunch boat as was the gig, we had our work cut out at times to keep her lee gunwale above water. Moreover, a short, steep, choppy sea had been raised that proved very trying to us, the boat driving her sharp stem viciously into it, and throwing frequent heavy showers of spray over herself, that not only drenched us all to the skin, but also necessitated the continuous use of the baler. Fortunately, we were not very greatly crowded; so that, despite the weight of our party and that of our provisions and water, the boat was fairly buoyant, and we shipped nothing heavier than spray; but my heart ached as I thought of the poor women and children cooped up in the long-boat, and pictured to myself their too probable piteous condition of cold and wet and misery.

As the night wore on, the weather grew steadily worse; and morning at length dawned upon us, hove-to under close-reefed canvas, with a strong gale blowing, and a high, steep, and dangerous sea running. And there was every prospect that there was worse to come, for the sun rose as a pale, wan, shapeless blot of sickly light, faintly showing through a veil of dim, grey, watery vapour, streaked with light-coloured patches of tattered scud, that swept athwart the louring sky at a furious rate, while the sea had that greenish, turbid appearance that is often noticeable as a precursor of bad weather.

None of the other boats were anywhere near us, so far as could be made out; but one of the men was still standing on a thwart, steadying himself by the mast, looking for them, when he suddenly made our hearts leap and our pulses quicken by flinging out his right arm and pointing vehemently, as he yelled:

"Sail ho! a couple of points on the lee bow. A ship, sir, steerin' large, under to'gallant-sails!"

"Let me get a look at her," answered I, as I clawed my way forward, noticing with consternation as I did so, that, despite the continuous baling that had been kept up, the water was fully three inches deep in the bottom of the boat, and that the lower tier of our provisions was, in consequence, most probably spoiled.

The man, having first carefully pointed out to me the exact direction in which I was to look for the stranger, climbed down off the thwart and so made room for me to take his place, which I immediately did. Yes; there she was, precisely as the man had said, a full-rigged ship, scudding under topgallant-sails. She was fully seven—maybe nearer eight—miles away, and although

rather on our lee bow at the moment when first sighted—in consequence of the gig having just then come to—was in reality still a trifle to windward of us. Of course it was utterly useless to hope that we could, by any means at our disposal, attract her attention at that distance; but as I looked almost despairingly at her, and noticed that she did not appear to be travelling very fast, it occurred to me that there was just a ghost of a chance that, by bearing up and running away to leeward, upon a course converging obliquely upon her own, we might be able to intercept her; or, if not that, we might at least be able to approach her nearly enough to make ourselves seen. It was worth attempting, I thought, for even though, in the event of failure, we should find ourselves in the end many miles more distant from Corvo than we then were, I attached but little importance to that; my conviction now being stronger than ever that our only hope of deliverance lay in being picked up, rather than in our being able to reach the Azores, or any other land. Noting carefully, therefore, the bearings of the stranger, and especially the fact that she appeared to be running dead to leeward, with squared yards, I made my way aft again, took the tiller, watched for a favourable opportunity, and succeeded in getting the gig before the wind without shipping very much water. Once fairly before the wind, the boat was able to bear a considerably greater spread of canvas than while hove-to; indeed an increase of sail immediately became an imperative necessity in order to avoid being caught and overrun, or pooped, by the sea; moreover we had to catch that ship, if we could. We therefore shook out a couple of reefs, and then went to breakfast; treating ourselves to as good a meal as the circumstances would permit.

The gig being double-ended, and modelled somewhat after the fashion of a whale-boat, scudded well and no longer shipped any water; our condition, therefore, was greatly improved, and running before the gale, as we now were, the strength of the wind was not so severely felt, nor did the chill of the blast penetrate our saturated clothing so cruelly as while we were hove-to. Our clothes gradually dried upon us, we baled out the boat, and in the course of an hour or so began to experience something approaching a return to comfort. Meanwhile, at frequent intervals, the bearing and distance of the strange sail was ascertained, and our spirits rose as, with every observation, the chances of our ultimately succeeding in intercepting her grew more promising. Another result of these observations, however, was the unwelcome discovery that the stranger was travelling at a considerably faster pace than we had at first credited her with; and that only the nicest and most accurate

judgment with regard to our own course would enable us to close with her.

That in itself, however, was not sufficient to occasion us any very grave anxiety, for we had the whole day before us; and what we had most greatly to fear was a further increase in the strength of the wind. Unhappily there was only too much reason to dread that this might happen, if, indeed, it was not in process of happening already; for the sky astern was rapidly assuming a blacker, wilder appearance, while it was unquestionable that the sea was increasing in height and breaking more heavily. This last was a serious misfortune for us in a double sense; for, on the one hand, it increased the danger of the boat being pooped, while on the other it materially reduced our progress, our low sails becoming almost completely becalmed, and the boat's way slackening every time that we settled into the hollow of a sea. So greatly did this retard us that at length, despite the undeniable fact that the gale was increasing, we shook out our last reef and attempted the hazardous experiment of scudding under whole canvas. And for a short time we did fairly well, although my heart was in my mouth every time that, as the boat soared upward to the crest of a sea, the blast struck her with a furious sweep, filling the sail with a jerk that threatened to take the mast out of her, and taxing my skill to the utmost to prevent her from broaching-to and capsizing. But it would not do; it was altogether too dangerous an experiment to be continued. It was no longer a question of skill in the handling of the boat, we were tempting Providence and courting disaster, for the wind was freshening rapidly, so we had to haul down a reef again, and even after we had done this we seemed to be scarcely any better off than before.

Meanwhile, however, in the midst of our peril and anxiety we had the satisfactory assurance that we were steadily nearing the ship; for we had risen her until, when both she and the gig happened to be simultaneously hove up on the crest of an unusually heavy sea, we could catch a glimpse not only of the whole of her canvas, but also of the sweep of her rail throughout its length, and we might now hope that at any moment some keen-eyed sailor might notice our tiny sail and call attention to it. Nay, there was just a possibility that this had happened already, for we presently became aware that the ship had taken in her topgallant-sails. Of course this might mean nothing more than mere ordinary precaution on the part of a commander anxious to avoid springing any of his spars; but it might also point to the conclusion that a momentary, doubtful glimpse of us had been caught by somebody, and that the

officer of the watch, while sceptical of belief, had shortened sail for a time to afford opportunity for further investigation. But whichever it might happen to be, it improved our prospects of eventual rescue, and we were glad and thankful accordingly.

The question now uppermost in our minds was whether we had or had not been seen by anyone on board the ship. Some of us felt convinced that we had—the wish, doubtless, being father to the thought; but, for my own part, I was exceedingly doubtful. For, as a rule—to which, however, some most shameful and dastardly exceptions have come under my own notice—sailors are always most eager to help their distressed brethren, even at the cost of very great personal inconvenience and peril; and, knowing this, I believed that, had only a momentary and exceedingly doubtful view of us been caught, steps would at once have been taken on board the ship to further test the matter. Some one, for instance, would probably have been sent aloft to get a more extended view of the ocean's surface; nay, it was by no means unlikely that an officer might have taken the duty upon himself, and have searched the ocean with the aid of a telescope, in either of which cases we should soon have been discovered; when the sight of a small boat battling for life against a rapidly increasing gale and an already extremely dangerous sea would doubtless have resulted in the ship hauling her wind to our rescue. Nothing of the kind, however, happened, and we continued our perilous run to leeward upon a course that was slowly converging upon that of the ship, with a feeling of growing doubt and angry despair at the blindness of those whom we were pursuing rapidly displacing the high hopes that had been aroused in our hearts at the first sight of that thrice-welcome sail.

The ship held steadily on her way, and all that we could do was to follow her, with the wind smiting down upon us more fiercely every minute, while each succeeding wave, as it overtook us, curled its angry, hissing crest more menacingly above the stern of the deeply-laden boat. It was a wild, reckless, desperate bit of boat-sailing; and the conviction rapidly grew upon us all that it could not last much longer, we should soon be compelled to abandon the pursuit, or succumb to the catastrophe that momentarily threatened us. If we could but hold out long enough to attract the attention of those blind bats yonder, all might yet be well; but when at length our desperate race had carried us to within about two and a half miles of the ship, and an occasional glimpse of the whole of her hull could be caught when we were both at the same instant hove up on the ridge of a sea, there was no perceptible indication whatever that we had

been seen by anybody aboard her. There was no truck, and no flag-halliard fitted to the mast of the gig, and we consequently had no means of hoisting a signal; but even if we had possessed such means they would probably have been useless, because if the sleepy lubbers had not noticed our sail, the exhibition of a comparatively small flag would hardly be likely to attract their attention.

We were still in the midst of an anxious discussion as to what we could possibly do to make ourselves seen, when an end came to our pursuit. A furious squall of wind and rain swooped down upon us, there was a crash, and the mast thwart, unable to endure the additional strain thrown upon it, gave way, the mast lurched forward and went over the bow, sails and all, and at the same moment an unusually heavy sea overtook us, broke in over the boat's stern, and filled her half-way to the thwarts.

I thought now that it was all over with us; fully expecting that the next sea would also break aboard, completely swamp the boat, and leave us all to swim for a few brief, agonising moments, and then to vanish for ever; yet with the never-slumbering instinct of self-preservation, I put the tiller hard over as the crest of the wave swept forward, and then frantically threw out an oar over the stern, with which to sweep the boat round head to sea. How it was achieved I know not to this day, but so furious a strength did I throw into my work that I actually succeeded in almost accomplishing my object; that is to say, I got the boat so far round that, when the next wave met us, the bluff of her starboard bow was presented to it, and although more water came aboard, it was not sufficient to very materially enhance the peril of our situation. Meanwhile the rest of the occupants seized the baler, a bucket that somebody had been thoughtful enough to throw into the boat when preparations were being made to leave the burning Indiaman, their caps, or even their hoots—the first thing, in fact, that came handy—and began baling for their lives.

Chapter Fourteen.

The shadow of death.

The mast and sails of the boat had gone clean over the bows into the water, and would in all probability have been lost to us but for the fact that the shrouds still held; and, this being the case, the boat rode to them as to a sort of floating anchor,

keeping her stem-on to the sea. Her trim was such that her bows were considerably more above water than her stern, which may have had something to do with the fact that, although the sea was now higher and more dangerous than ever, the water no longer broke into her. Dumaresq and I, however, were both of opinion that the floating mast, with the sails attached, served in some measure as a breakwater for the seas to expend their most dangerous energies upon, and after discussing the matter a little further it was determined to submit our theory to the test of experiment. The shrouds were accordingly unbent, and the mast hauled alongside, when the boat again began to ship water; moreover, an oar over the stern at once became necessary to keep her bows on to the sea. This experiment satisfied us that our impression was something more than a mere fancy, and we at once went to work to further test it. There were six oars in the boat, and another portion of her equipment was a painter, some six fathoms in length. We securely lashed together the whole six of the oars and the mast, with the sails still attached, in a sort of bundle, by the middle, using the end of the painter as a lashing, and when everything had been made secure we veered away the painter until the whole of it was out, and the bundle of oars and what-not was floating about five fathoms ahead of the boat. This served as a drag, again bringing the gig's bows on to the sea, and a comparatively short period of observation sufficed to convince us that the arrangement did indeed serve also as an appreciable protection to the boat. By the time that this was done the rain had nearly ceased, and presently it cleared up to leeward, revealing the ship once more, under double-reefed topsails, now broad on our larboard quarter and hopelessly beyond all possibility of being overtaken, even had we dared to resume the chase, which, after our recent experience, and in the face of the terrible weather, none of us dreamed of attempting.

It was a cruelly bitter disappointment to us all to reflect that we had been so near to the possibility of rescue, and yet had missed it, and I caught the rumbling notes of more than one sea-blessing invoked upon the heads of the crew, who ought to have seen us, but apparently did not. It was useless, however, to cry over spilt milk, or to murmur against the mysterious decrees of Providence. Our business now was to do all that lay in our power to keep the boat afloat and enable her to ride out the gale; so we baled her dry, trimmed her a trifle more by the stern to enable her to present a bolder bow to the sea, and then piped to dinner.

And now arose fresh cause for distress and apprehension, for when we came to look into the state of our provisions, it was found that pretty nearly everything that was spoilable had been ruined by the salt-water that we had shipped, our bread especially being almost reduced to pulp. We picked out the least damaged portions, however, and ate them, with some chunks of raw salt beef, washing down the whole with a sparing libation of weak grog, after which we felt in somewhat better spirits.

But, oh! the cold and misery of it all! We were drenched to the skin, and the wind seemed to penetrate to our very marrow. Moreover, there was no hope whatever of the slightest improvement so long as the gale continued, for even though the rain had ceased, the air was full of spindrift and scud-water that fell upon us in drenching showers; while, cooped up as we were within the circumscribed dimensions of a small boat, there was no possibility of warming ourselves by exercise or active movement of any sort. The sea was running too dangerously high to admit of our taking to the oars and keeping ourselves warm by that expedient, and all that we could do to mitigate our misery was to huddle closely together in the bottom of the boat, and so shield ourselves as far as possible from the piercing wind and the drenching spray. Had we been able to smoke, matters would not have been so bad with us, but we had no means of obtaining a light; so there we crouched, hour after hour, our teeth clenched or chattering with cold, our drenched clothing clinging to our shivering bodies, and the gale howling over our heads with ever-increasing fury, while the sheets of salt spray lashed us relentlessly like whips of steel. So utterly miserable did we become that at length we even ceased to rise occasionally to take a look round, to see whether, perchance, another sail might have hove in sight. I believe that some of my companions in suffering found a temporary refuge from their wretchedness in short snatches of fitful sleep; at all events I caught at intervals the sound of low mutterings, as of sleeping men; but, as for me, exhausted though I was, I could not sleep. My anxiety on behalf of these poor wretches, who were in a way under my command, and who were certainly dependent to a great extent upon my experience and judgment, seemed to have driven sleep for ever from my eyes.

And so we lay there, hour after hour, now flung aloft until the whole ocean to the limits of the horizon lay spread around us, anon sweeping down the back of some giant billow until it seemed that the boat was about to plunge to the ocean's bed, and the passage of every hour was marked by an increasing

greyness and haggardness in the faces of my companions, while a more hopelessly despairing expression came into their eyes.

At length, however, shortly before sunset, a welcome break appeared in the sky to windward; a gleam of watery, yellow light spread along the horizon; the pall of murky vapour broke up into detached masses; small but gradually widening patches of blue sky appeared here and here; and finally we got a momentary glimpse of the sun through a break in the clouds, just as the great luminary was on the point of sinking below the western horizon. We greeted the blessed sight with a cheer of reviving hope, for we knew that the gale was breaking, and that with the moderating of the wind and sea we should once again be able to take some active steps toward our preservation; while, apart from that, the finer weather would at least afford us some relief from our present suffering and misery. About half an hour later there was a noticeable diminution in the strength of the wind, which by midnight had become merely a moderate breeze. The sea no longer broke dangerously, the sky cleared, the stars beamed benignantly down upon us, and there was every prospect of our being able to resume our voyage on the morrow. But although, so far as the weather was concerned, matters were greatly improving with us, our suffering from cold was still very acute, for the night wind seemed to penetrate right through our wet clothes and to strike colder than ice upon our skins that were now burning with fever.

As for me, I envied my more fortunate companions who were able to sleep. I was deadly weary, worn out with prolonged watching and anxiety and exposure; my eyes were burning and my head throbbing with the fever that consumed me, while my teeth were chattering with cold to such an extent that I could scarcely make my speech intelligible. Wild, fantastic, irrelevant fancies were whirling confusedly through my brain, and I found it simply impossible to fix my mind upon the important question of the direction in which we ought to steer upon the resumption of our voyage. For the impression now forced itself upon me that poor Captain Chesney had committed an error of judgment in adhering to his determination to make for the Azores, after the breeze had sprung up from a direction which placed those islands almost dead to windward, and his only alternative of making for the Canaries appeared to be open to the same objection, although in a considerably lesser degree. Then arose the question: If he was mistaken in thus deciding, what ought he to have done? But to this, in the then disordered condition of my mental faculties, I could find no satisfactory reply. At length, while mentally groping for a solution to this knotty problem, I

sank into a feverish semi-somnolent condition that eventually merged into sleep, and when I again became conscious, the sun was flashing his first beams across the surface of the heaving waters, now no longer scourged to fury by the lashing of a gale, but just ruffled to a deep, tender blue by the gentle breathing of a soft breeze from the north-east. A very heavy swell was still running, of course; but it no longer broke, and there was nothing whatever to prevent our resuming our voyage at once, saving the question—Whither?

The matter, however, that called for our first and most imperative attention was our own condition. We were still suffering greatly from the effects of prolonged exposure in our still damp clothes, and we could hope for little or no amelioration until our garments were once more dry, and the healthy action of our skin restored; so, to facilitate this, I suggested that we should all strip, and spread out our clothing to thoroughly dry in the sun's now ardent beams, and that, while the drying process was in progress, we should all go overboard and indulge in a good swim. The greater portion of our party thought this advice good enough to be acted upon, and in a few minutes seven of us were in the water and swimming vigorously round the boat; the other three were unable to swim, but they imitated us so far as to strip and pour buckets of water over each other. The water felt pleasantly warm in comparison with the temperature of the air, and we remained overboard for nearly half an hour; then we scrambled back into the boat again, rubbed ourselves and each other vigorously with the palms of our hands, while our bodies were in process of being dried by the joint action of the sun and air; and finally we donned our clothes again, they being by this time quite dry, feeling much refreshed and in every way considerably the better for our bath. Our next business was to go to breakfast, but our bread was by this time so completely destroyed as to be quite uneatable. We therefore threw it overboard, and made a meagre and unpalatable meal off more raw salt beef, washed down as before with weak grog.

And while the meal was in progress I brought up the question that had been vexing me during the previous night; namely, the direction in which we should steer. I had been giving this matter my best consideration during the time that I had been overboard; indeed Dumaresq and I had been discussing it together as we swam industriously round and round the boat, and we both agreed in the conclusion that the appearance of the sky warranted the belief that we were on the very margin of the north-east trade-wind, if not actually within its influence.

And if this were indeed the case, it appeared that the proper course for us to adopt would be to bear up and run for the West Indies, instead of attempting to reach the Azores or even the Canaries. For while Corvo was only seven hundred and twenty miles from the spot where the Indiaman was destroyed, while Teneriffe was about thirteen hundred and eighty miles, and Saint Thomas, in the West Indies, fifteen hundred miles from the same spot, we could reckon with tolerable certainty upon reaching the latter island in about twelve days if the breeze now blowing actually happened to be the young trade-wind; while, under the same supposition, it was exceedingly doubtful when, if ever, we should succeed in reaching either the Azores or the Canary Islands. It was altogether too momentous a question for me to settle off-hand and upon my own responsibility, so I laid the matter before the whole boat's company, inviting them to decide it by a preponderating vote. I found that the majority agreed with me in the opinion that we might be on the fringe of, if not actually within, the influence of the trade-wind, but when it came to the question of bearing up and running for the West Indies, the great distance to be traversed seemed to frighten them. They were hardly prepared to face the prospect of nearly a fortnight in an open boat, even although we might reckon with tolerable certainty upon a fair wind and moderate weather all the time. They pointed out that our stock of provisions was wholly inadequate for such a voyage, unless we were all prepared to go upon an exceedingly short allowance forthwith, and they appeared to consider that, by adhering to Captain Chesney's plan, we should stand a better chance of falling in with and being picked up by a ship. As to whether we should make for the Azores or the Canaries, we were pretty unanimously of opinion that, despite the much greater distance of the latter, if we were, as we supposed, within the influence of the trade-wind, we should stand a much better chance of fetching it; and after some further discussion it was definitely determined to shape the best course we could for Teneriffe.

This important matter settled, all that we had to do was to lash the mast thwart in its place again, haul the mast and oars alongside, get them inboard, and make sail, which we did forthwith.

For the next five days we sailed comfortably enough to the eastward, making on an average, about eighty-five miles in the twenty-four hours, during which not a single sail had been sighted; and then the wind gradually died away, and it fell stark calm. This obliged us to take to the oars; and whereas during the gale we had suffered greatly from cold and wet, all our

complaint now was of the intense heat; for the clouds had passed away, leaving the sky a vault of purest blue, out of which the sun blazed down upon us relentlessly for about eleven hours out of the twenty-four. This, coupled with our exertions at the oars—and possibly the profuse perspiration induced thereby—provoked a continuous thirst which we had no means of satisfying; for immediately upon our determination to make for Teneriffe, we had carefully gauged our stock of provisions and water, and had placed ourselves upon a very short allowance of both. And, to make matters still worse, the setting in of the calm immediately rendered it imperatively necessary to still further reduce our already far too scanty allowance.

There was nothing for it, however, but to toil on, hour after hour, with ever-decreasing strength; the only redeeming feature of our case being the knowledge that, should we now chance to sight a ship, she could not possibly sail away from us so long as the calm lasted. But when the calm had continued for twenty-four hours, during which we pulled continuously to the eastward, relieving each other at frequent intervals, this reflection almost ceased to afford us any comfort, for we found that short commons and hard work together were exhausting our strength with such alarming rapidity that, unless we sighted the hoped-for sail pretty speedily, we should have no strength left with which to pull to her. And when another twelve hours had passed over our heads, and another cloudless, breathless, blazing morning had dawned upon us, the men with one accord laid in their oars, protesting their utter inability to any longer keep up the exhausting work of pulling the boat I argued with, entreated, and threatened them alternately, without avail; they turned a deaf ear to me, and lay down in the bottom of the boat, where they almost instantly fell into a restless, troubled sleep. All, that is to say, except Dumaresq, who recognised as clearly as I did the vital necessity for us to push onward as speedily as possible; after discussing the situation for a while, therefore, we threw over a couple of oars, and, placing the boat compass between my feet where I could see it, paddled wearily and painfully onward until noon, when we ceased, that I might have an opportunity to take an observation for the determination of our latitude. While I was still engaged upon this operation the men awoke; and as soon as I had ascertained our latitude we went to dinner; if dinner that could be called which consisted of a small cube of raw meat, measuring about an inch each way, and as much tepid, fetid water as would half-fill the neck of a rum-bottle that had been broken off from the body to serve as a measure.

After dinner the men again stretched themselves out, either in the bottom of the boat or on the thwarts, and once more sought surcease of suffering in sleep; and again Dumaresq and I threw out our oars and toiled at them until sunset. But it was cruel work, and nothing short of such urgent necessity as ours would have induced me to do it. Then the men awoke again, apparently somewhat refreshed by their day's rest, and we went to supper. The fact that Dumaresq and I had been working at the oars all through the scorching day, while they had been sleeping, seemed to awaken a sense of shame in some of them; and after supper they took to the oars of their own accord, announcing their determination to rest henceforth through the day, and to work all night, a plan which I was at once compelled to admit had much to recommend it. And so, while the men pulled pretty steadily on through the night, Dumaresq and I took watch and watch at the tiller.

Another breathless morning dawned; we went to breakfast, and the men then lay down to sleep, as on the previous day, while Dumaresq and I laboured at the oars until noon, when the gallant young Frenchman was compelled to give up, declaring that he could not pull another stroke, even though his life depended upon it. I could, of course, do nothing single-handed; so after dinner we all lay down together, and the sleep of utter exhaustion soon fell upon me. When I next awoke the men were already astir and getting their supper; and it appeared to me, from the look in their faces, that they would have been better pleased had Dumaresq and I remained asleep. After supper they threw out their oars, and the Frenchman and I sat together in the stern-sheets, moodily discussing the situation, and marvelling at our strange ill-fortune in having sighted but one solitary sail ever since the destruction of the Indiaman.

"The fact is," remarked Dumaresq, in a low tone, "that we have made a terrible mistake in deciding to try for Teneriffe. We ought to have acted upon your suggestion to bear away for the West Indies. Had we done so, we should have been more than half-way there by this time—if, indeed, we had not already been fallen in with and picked up. As it is, it is now clear enough that, if as we both believed, we were on the edge of the trade-wind, we have lost it again, and it may be many days before we shall get another breeze. And should that be the case, it is my belief that not one of us will ever see dry land again. Note our condition at this moment; observe our companions. When we abandoned the ill-fated *Manilla* they were a stout, sturdy crew of willing, obedient men; whilst now they are a gang of gaunt and savage outlaws, no longer amenable to discipline, and

rendered ferociously selfish by starvation. Did you observe the fell gleam of animosity with which they regarded us when we awoke this evening and helped ourselves to our share of the provisions? There has been no hint of violence thus far; but, mark my words, Bowen, unless we are rescued within the next forty-eight hours this boat will become the scene of a ghastly tragedy. Ah! *mon Dieu!* look at that!"

Dumaresq had brought his lips close to my ear while speaking, and the accompanying turn of his head had permitted his eyes to glance over my shoulder into the water astern of the boat. As he uttered his closing exclamation he pointed to the boat's wake; and there, not two fathoms away from the rudder, could be seen two large sharks, their forms clearly indicated in the phosphorescent water, steadily following the boat, and swimming at a distance of about three feet below the water.

"What did I say?" continued Dumaresq. "The shadow of death is hovering over this boat; those sharks see it, and they will follow us until they get their prey!"

Chapter Fifteen.

Dying of hunger and thirst.

I must confess that the sudden appearance of those two ferocious monsters of the deep excited within me a feeling of intense horror and uneasiness; for I had heard so much about the alleged mysterious instinct by which the shark is said to be enabled to foresee the approaching death of one or more members of a crew, and had listened to so many apparently authentic stories confirming this belief in the creature's powers, that I had grown to be quite prepared to believe that there might be something more than mere superstition at the bottom of it. And now it almost appeared as though I was to have an opportunity of learning by personal experience what amount of truth there really was in the gruesome theory. But after the first shock of horror had passed, reason and common sense whispered that the presence of these visitors, instead of being a constant horror and menace to us, might, by good luck, be converted into a valuable source of food-supply, and I accordingly at once informed the men that there were two sharks following us, and inquired whether any of them could suggest a plan for the capture of one of the fish. I immediately discovered, however, that I should have done better to have

said nothing; for the announcement excited the utmost consternation; while my proposal to attempt the capture of one of the fish was ridiculed as something approaching the height of absurdity. Tom Hardy—a weather-beaten seaman, who had been knocking about in all parts of the world for thirty years from the time when he first plunged his hands into the tar bucket at the age of fourteen—at once rose from his thwart, where he was pulling the stroke oar; and, looking over the heads of Dumaresq and myself, stared intently down at the fish for a few seconds, and then resumed his seat, remarking:

“Ay, mates, what Mr Bowen says is true enough; there’s two of ‘em; and that means that two of this here party is goin’ to lose the number of their mess afore long; you mark my words and see if they don’t come true. As to catchin’ either of them sharks, why, we haven’t got no hook to catch ‘em with. And, if we had, ‘twouldn’t be of no use to try; them fish ain’t to be caught; they’re astarn of us for a purpose; and there they’ll stay until that purpose have come to pass. I’ve knowed this sort of thing to happen afore. I was once aboard of a brig called the *Black Snake*, hailin’ from Liverpool, and tradin’ between the West Injies and the Guinea coast. We’d made a fine run across from Barbadoes, and was within a week’s run of the Old Calabar river when it fell calm with us, just as it have done now.

“There wasn’t nothing the matter with none of us at the time; but a’ter we’d been becalmed about a week—which, let me tell ye, mates, ain’t nothing so very much out of the common in them latitoods—the second mate fell sick, and took to his bunk. He hadn’t been there not two hours when somebody sings out as there was a shark under the counter; and we goes to work to try and catch him. But, mates, he wasn’t to be caught, though we tried him all ways, even to pitchin’ the bait right down atop of his ugly snout. Mind you, he was ready enough to swaller as much pork as ever we chose to give him, so long as there wasn’t no hook in it; but if there was a hook buried in it he wouldn’t so much as look at it.

“Well, we was obliged to give it up at last; and as we was haulin’ in the line and unbendin’ the hook I heard the chief mate say to the skipper:—

““That settles poor Hobbs’ hash, anyhow!”

““How d’ye mean?” says the skipper, short and angry-like.

““Why,” says the mate, ‘I means that Hobbs won’t get better, and that shark knows it. He’s just waitin’ for him!’

“‘Oh, nonsense,’ says the skipper; ‘I’m surprised, Mr Barker, to hear a hintelligent man like you sayin’ such things.’

“And he marches off down below, and goes into the second mate’s cabin to see how the poor chap was gettin’ on. About twenty minutes a’terwards he comes up on deck again, and tells the mate as poor Mr Hobbs have got the yaller fever. And, mates, I takes notice that the skipper weren’t just then lookin’ so extra well hisself. About a hour a’terwards he goes below again; and by and by the steward comes for’ard, lookin’ pretty frightened, I can tell ye, and says as the skipper is sick, too.

“‘I wonder whether there’s a shark come for him, as well as for the second mate,’ says one of the men, jokin’ like. ‘Run aft, steward,’ says he, ‘and look over the taffrail, and see.’

“The steward did as he was told; and presently he comes for’ard again, as white as a ghost; and:—

“‘There’s two of ‘em now,’ says he. And sure enough, shipmates, when we went aft and had a look for ourselves, there was two sharks just playin’ about under the stern, scullin’ here and there, lazy-like, but never goin’ very far away.

“I told the mate of this, and p’inted out the brutes to him; but he didn’t seem a bit put out by it; he just laughed and said:—

“‘Then the skipper’s goose is cooked, too; and I shall have to take charge of the ship myself!’

“And, as he said it, mates, you may believe me or not, as you like, but up comes a third shark, and jines company with the two that was standin’ off and on.

“‘Hillo!’ says the mate, now lookin’ frightened enough; ‘what’s the meanin’ of this here, I wonder? Three of ‘em,’ he says; ‘one for Hobbs, and one for the cap’n: but who’s the third one a’ter?’

“‘Mates, what I’m goin’ to tell you is as true as that I’m sittin’ here on this here thwart: the mate was took ill that very night; and the next day he follered poor Mr Hobbs and the skipper over the rail; and then the three sharks left us. And a week later the brig went ashore on the coast, about the middle of as dark a night as ever you see, and me and two more was all as managed to reach the sand-hills alive.’”

This weird story, told with all the impressiveness of a man who knew himself to be speaking the truth—emphasised as it was by

the persistent presence of those two remorseless brutes under our own stern,—affected the listeners powerfully; and at its close there was not one of us, I will venture to say, but was firmly convinced that at least two of our party were doomed.

We continued pulling to the eastward until nearly midnight that night, relieving each other at the oars at short intervals, when, suddenly, one of the men—Peter Green by name—dropped his oar and, with a choking cry, rolled off his thwart and fell prone into the bottom of the boat. His place was immediately taken by another; but within a quarter of an hour this man, too, was obliged to give up; and so, one after the other, they all succumbed, until only Dumaresq and myself were left; and we had not been tugging at the oars five minutes when the Frenchman cried:

“It is no good, *mon ami*; I am ‘gastados’, as the Spaniards say; I am expended, worn out!” He rose to his feet; staggered heavily aft, and sank down in the stern-sheets with a groan and a gasping cry of:

“Water! water! For the love of God give me a mouthful of water, or I shall die!”

The poor fellow had, of course, been receiving the same allowance as the rest of us; and the small quantity of putrid fluid now remaining in the bottom of our breaker was of such priceless value that I could not give him any more without inflicting a grievous injustice and injury upon the rest; nevertheless, I could not sit there and see him die; so I drew a single allowance from the cask—explaining to the men as well as my own parched throat would allow, that I would forego my own allowance next time that it was due—and, raising his head, I poured it into his mouth, bitterly grudging him every drop, I am ashamed to say, as I did so. There was only enough to just moisten his cracked lips and his dry, black tongue; but, such as it was, it seemed to revive him somewhat, and, squeezing my hand gratefully, he settled himself more comfortably on the thwart, and presently appeared to sink into a state of semi-unconsciousness that perhaps partially served in place of sleep.

I would gladly have followed his example if I could, but it was impossible. My stubborn constitution seemed to defy the destructive wear and tear of prolonged hunger and thirst; but my sufferings were beyond the power of language to portray; my craving hunger was so intense that I believe I could have eaten and enjoyed any food, however revolting, could I but have obtained it; while my thirst was so overpowering that it

was with the utmost difficulty I combated the temptation to open a vein and moisten my parched and burning tongue and throat with my own blood. Equally difficult was it to resist the temptation to take a long, cool, satisfying draught of the salt-water that lapped so tantalisingly against the sides of the boat, and shimmered so temptingly in the starlight all around me; but I knew what the consequences of such an act would be, and, by the resolute exercise of all the will power remaining to me I contrived to overcome the longing. Yet so excruciating was my torment that I felt I must do something to alleviate it, even though the alleviation were to be of the briefest. I therefore determined to try an experiment; and, stripping off all my clothing, I plunged the garments, one by one, into the water alongside, until they were saturated; when I donned them again. The cool, wet contact of them with my dry, burning skin seemed to afford some relief to my tormenting thirst; and, encouraged by this small measure of success, I next cut a strip of leather from one of my boots and, dividing this into small pieces, I placed them, one at a time, in my mouth, masticating them as well as I could, and finally swallowing them. It will, perhaps, convey to the reader some idea of the intensity of my hunger when I say that I actually enjoyed these pieces of leather, and that my unendurable craving for food was in an appreciable degree appeased by them, to an extent sufficient, indeed, to enable me to lie down and actually fall asleep.

I remember that my dreams, that night, were of feasting and drinking, of a profusion of appetising viands and choice wines spread upon long tables that stood under the welcome shadow of umbrageous trees and close to the borders of sparkling streams of sweet, crystal-clear water; and when I awoke the sun was again rising above the horizon into a sky of fleckless blue reflected by an ocean of glassy calm unbroken by the faintest discoverable suggestion of a flaw of wind anywhere upon its mirror-like surface. My companions were also stirring; some of them contenting themselves by merely grasping the gunwale of the boat and so raising their bodies that they could look round them for a moment, and then sinking back with a moan of despair at the sight of the breathless calm and the blank horizon, while others—two or three whose strength still sufficed for the extra effort—painfully raised themselves upon their feet and scanned the horizon with a longer and more searching gaze for a sail. There was nothing to be seen, however, in the whole visible stretch of the ocean, save the fins of the two sharks which haunted us so remorselessly; so, with inarticulate mutterings of despair, and hoarse, broken curses at the ill-fortune which so persistently dogged us, we prepared to

devour our last insignificant ration of food and consume the last drops of our hoarded water.

The next minute saw us transformed into a crew of furious, raving maniacs; for—the food and the water had both disappeared! the locker forward in which our last morsel of meat had been deposited on the previous night was empty; the water-breaker was dry! some unscrupulous villain, some vile, dastardly thief among us had stolen and consumed both! The discovery of this detestable crime had the temporary effect of a powerful restorative upon us; our furious indignation temporarily imbued our bodies with new vigour; and in an instant every man of us was upon his feet and glaring round, with eyes ablaze, upon his fellows, in search of the criminal. In vain I strove to quell the excitement, to stay the clamour, and to restore order; discipline and obedience indeed were at an end, distinctions of rank no longer existed, the ordinary restraints of civilisation were discarded, our frightful situation had reduced us to the condition of wild beasts, and my entreaties that the matter might be dealt with in something like judicial form might as well have been urged upon the empty air.

There was not much difficulty in identifying the culprit. He was a Welshman, named Evans, a poor, pitiful, sneaking creature, one of the under-stewards belonging to the *Manilla*, who had systematically shirked his share of the work, and done his best to evade his share of the hardship from the very first; and although, when taxed with his crime, he at first strenuously denied it, his manner belied his words, and presently he flung himself upon his knees and—with tears and protestations of his inability to resist the temptation that had suddenly come upon him—acknowledged the theft, and abjectly besought our forgiveness. I very much doubt whether, in my then frame of mind, I could have been induced to forgive the miserable creature: but I certainly had no desire to inflict any punishment upon him beyond what he would derive from my undisguised expressions of contempt and abhorrence. Not so his more immediate companions, however. Evans had no sooner confessed than, with a hoarse howl of fury, his self-constituted judges whipped out their sheath-knives, while in a paroxysm of terror the wretched steward leapt to his feet and hastily retreated forward, shrieking for mercy. The men followed him; and ere I could intervene there was a scuffle, a rapid rain of blows, a smothered groan, a splash alongside, and the next instant the Welshman's head reappeared above water, about a fathom away from the boat, his face grey and distorted with fear, and his skinny hands outstretched in a vain endeavour to

reach the gunwale of the boat. Then, almost in the self-same instant, and before one's benumbed senses found time to realise the ghastly tragedy, there was a rapid swirl of water alongside, an ear-splitting yell, and the miserable man was dragged down, an ensanguined patch in the deep crystalline blue, and a few transitory air-bubbles alone marking the spot from which he had vanished. Involuntarily I glanced astern. There was but one shark's fin now visible!

"Shame upon you, men; shame upon you!" cried I, emerging from the temporary trance of stupefaction which seemed to have seized me while this frightful tragedy was in progress. "You have taken a human life, and branded yourselves as murderers. And for what? Simply because that poor craven of a fellow appropriated a small morsel of putrid meat and a few drops of disgusting liquid that, evenly divided among you all, could have done you no appreciable good. At most, it could but have prolonged your lives an hour or two."

"Ay, that's just it!" huskily interrupted one of the men. "The meat and the water that we've lost would have give us another hour or two of life, and who's to say that just that hour or two mightn't have made all the difference between livin' and dyin' to us? If anything was to happen to drift into view within the next few hours, that bit of meat and they few drops of water might have give us strength enough to handle the oars again and pull far enough to be sighted and picked up; but now we're done for, all hands of us. Our strength is gone, and we've nothin' left to give it back to us, even if a whole fleet was in sight at this present moment. When that chap stole the last of our grub he stole our lives with it. He's the murderer, not us, and he deserved what he got! Oh, my God, water! Give us water, for Christ's sake!"

And, throwing up his poor, lean, shrivelled hands toward the cloudless sky, with a gesture eloquent of frantic, despairing appeal, the poor, tortured creature suddenly collapsed and fell senseless athwart the gunwale of the boat, with his arms hanging down into the water. We dragged him quickly inboard again, but we were not a second too soon, for we had scarcely done so when the remaining shark was alongside, glaring up at us with a look of fell longing in those cruel goggle eyes of his, that seemed to say he intended to have his prey sooner or later, although we had baulked him of it for the present.

The dreadful exhaustion of reaction from the late excitement now seized upon the rest of us, and one by one we wearily sank down again into our respective places in the boat. Then I told

the men by what means I had obtained temporary relief during the night, advising them to try the same method, and presently we were all sitting in our wet clothes, ravenously chewing away upon strips of our shoe leather. But nobody thought of again having recourse to the oars; indeed our strength had now so completely melted away that I doubt very much whether a single man in the whole of that boat's company—saving, perhaps, myself—could have laid out an oar unaided.

The blazing hot, breathless day lagged slowly along, every hour seeming to spin itself out to a more intolerable length than the last, and with every moment our suffering grew more nearly unbearable, until toward evening I seemed to be going mad, for the most fantastic ideas went crowding through my whirling brain, and I now and then caught myself muttering the most utter nonsense, now laughing, now weeping and moaning like a child. Anon I found myself kneeling in the stern-sheets and supporting my body upon one arm as I gesticulated with the other while apostrophising that demon shark—or were there two of them again, or three? I remember laughing to myself uproariously, noticing at the same time, with a sort of wonder, what a wild, eldritch, gibbering laugh it was, at the thought of how those sharks—yes, *there were three*; I was certain of it—would jostle and hustle each other, in their greedy haste to get at me, were I to simply stand up and topple over the gunwale into the water. And how easily—how ridiculously easily—I might do it too. I laughed again at the absurdity of taking so much trouble and enduring such frightful extremity of suffering to preserve a life that might be so readily got rid of, and wondered dully why I had been so foolish as to go through it all when it might be put an end to in a single moment. Why, I asked myself, should I remain any longer in the boat with that great, red, flaming eye staring so mercilessly down upon me out of that brazen sky, when the laughing blue water smiled so temptingly up into my eyes and wooed me to its cool embrace? There would be no more hunger and thirst down there, no relentless sun to torment me century after century by darting his fiery beams down upon my uncovered head and through my hissing, seething brain. A plunge, and all my miseries would be at an end. I would make that plunge; I would seek those cool, cerulean depths; I would—Ah! I had forgotten you, you devils! What! are you waiting for me? Are you growing impatient? How many of you are there? One, two, three, four—stop, stop. I cannot count you if you swarm around the boat in that unseemly fashion! Why, there are hundreds of you, thousands, millions! The sea is black with you! Your waving fins cover the

ocean to the farthest confines of the horizon! And you are all waiting for me! Very well, then, I shall disappoint you. I shall—

When I recovered from my delirium it was night. The stars were shining brightly, and the air was deliciously cool after the scorching heat of the day. Strange to say, I no longer felt hungry. The craving for food was gone, but its place was more than supplied by an increased agony of thirst which seared my vitals as with fire. My lips were dry and cracked; my tongue felt shrivelled and hard in my mouth. I tried to speak to Dumaresq, who was lying in the bottom of the boat with his glazed eyes turned up at the stars, but I could give utterance only to a husky, hissing sound. There was no movement on the part of any of the forms that were dimly discernable, huddled up in the bottom of the boat. Whether they were dead or only asleep I knew not, nor cared. Life and everything connected with it had lost all interest for me I was dying. I knew it, and longed only for the end to come that I might be delivered out of my misery. With inexpressible pain I raised myself to my knees to take one more last look round, lest peradventure a sail should by some miraculous interposition of Providence have drifted within our ken, but there was nothing. There could be nothing while that murderous calm lasted. I felt the old delirium returning upon me; it was rioting within my brain. Strange forms and hideous shapes floated around me. The dead steward climbed in over the gunwale and stood in the eyes of the boat, denouncing us as murderers and calling curses down upon us. Then the scene changed. A glorious light shone round about us; soft strains of sweetest music came floating to us across the placid waters; delicious perfumes filled the air. There was a gentle murmuring sound as of a soft wind among trees and a gentle tinkling as of a running stream. Then my brain seemed to burst. I was dimly conscious that I was falling backward, and I knew no more.

Chapter Sixteen.

Captain Renouf.

Where was I? What was this darksome, foul, and evil-smelling place? Who was that forbidding-looking individual sitting there smoking under that swaying, smoky, dimly-burning, miserable apology for a lamp? And, finally, what had happened that my limbs should feel heavy as lead, and that I should be too weak to turn upon my cruelly-hard, box-like pallet?

Such were the questions that slowly and laboriously formed themselves within my mind when I at length awoke from that state of blessed unconsciousness which I had believed to be death. For some time I lay painfully revolving these questions in my mind, groping about for information in a sort of dim, mental twilight, so obscure that I was not even certain of my own identity. Gradually, however—very gradually,—the twilight brightened with returning life and reason, and I found myself beginning to identify my surroundings. I became conscious of a rhythmical rising and falling and swaying movement, accompanied by a creaking, grinding sound, and the wash and gurgle of water outside the planking that formed two of the three walls of the triangular apartment in which I found myself, and I somehow recognised these movements and sounds as familiar. Then I heard a voice at some distance, shouting something that I could not distinguish, answered by two or three voices almost immediately overhead. There was a noise of ropes being thrown down upon planking, and a further outcry of voices, accompanied by a creaking sound and the flapping of canvas. And then it suddenly dawned upon me that I was lying in a bunk in a ship's forecabin, and that the forbidding-looking stranger must be one of the crew.

But why was it, I asked myself, that this man was a stranger to me? Why, indeed, was it that all my surroundings were strange to me; for I could not recall that I had ever seen any of them before? And then, as I lay puzzling over this perplexing problem, the past gradually unfolded itself before me; first of all confusedly, as one recalls the images and incidents of an imperfectly remembered dream, and then more clearly, until it had all come back to me in the fulness of its hideous reality. I recollected everything, my memories beginning, strangely enough, as I think, with the incidents of my earliest childhood, and gradually extending through the years until I arrived at the incident of the burning Indiaman, the boat-voyage, the pursuit of the strange ship, the gale, and our subsequent sufferings from thirst and starvation. And, as the remembrance of the final horrors of that awful experience returned to me, my thirst seemed to return with it, and I cried aloud for water, feeling surprised, as I did so, to find that my voice had returned to me, and that my throat, tongue, and lips, although still very sore and painful, were no longer dry and hard as they had been when I was last conscious of anything.

The repulsive-looking individual, apparently the sole occupant of the forecabin except myself, at once rose from the chest upon

which he was sitting, and approached my bunk, bending over and peering down into my face.

"Aha! my frien'!" he exclaimed, in a strong French accent; "so you have come to life again, have you? *Bon!* zat is grand; ze capitaine he vill be rejoice to hear ze news; for he say, ven ve pull you up out of ze *bateau*, 'Aha! here is von fine fellow; he mus' be *très fort* ven he is vell; ve mus' try to save him; he vill be more useful in our—vat you call, eh?—*gaillard d'avant*, dan in ze stomach of ze shark!' You vant vattare, eh? *Bon!* plenty vattare here, *mon ami*; plenty provision too; you not starve no more; you lie still in ze bunk, and I shall bring you all t'ings *nécessaire* to make you veil, *promptement*."

So saying, he went to the other end of the forecastle, and producing a large, rusty, tin can, and an equally rusty, and woefully battered tin pannikin, poured out a draught, which he brought to me, and, supporting my head upon his shoulder, held to my lips. I had an opportunity to take a good look at him now, as he bent his face close to mine, and, so far as I could see by the dim light of the forecastle, his repulsiveness of appearance was due rather to the filthy condition of his person and clothing than to the expression of his countenance; for although his skin was dark with accumulated grime, his long whiskers, moustache, and black greasy locks matted and unkempt, and his features frightfully scarred with small-pox, there was a genial, mirthful sparkle in his coal-black eyes that somewhat favourably impressed me.

The draught which he offered me was deliciously cool and refreshing; being composed of water strongly dashed with a crude, sour sort of wine. I swallowed it at a gulp, and was about to put a few interrogations to my new friend, when, from the bunk adjoining my own, there arose a feeble cry that I identified as the voice of Dumaresq; and my grimy nurse, gently laying my head back upon the pillow, at once hurried away to attend to his other patient. I heard a few low-murmured words from Dumaresq, followed by a reply from the unprepossessing unknown, and then I fell into a delightfully refreshing, dreamless slumber.

When I next awoke it was night, for I could just catch a glimpse of a narrow strip of star-lit sky swinging to-and-fro athwart the open scuttle communicating with the deck, in unison with the pendulum-like roll of the ship. There appeared to be a fine breeze blowing, for the vessel was heeling strongly; the thunder of the wind in the sails, and the piping of it through the taut rigging came down through the scuttle with a pleasant,

slumberous sound, and the roar of the bow-wave, close to my ear, with the quick, confused swirl and gurgle of water along the planks, assured me that the ship was moving at a tolerably rapid rate. The ever-burning lamp still swung from its blackened beam, its yellow flame wavering hither and thither in the eddying draught of wind that streamed down through the scuttle, and its fat, black smoke coiling upward in fantastic wreaths until it was lost in the darkness among the beams.

A figure—a slumbering figure—still occupied the chest, and mistaking it at first for my grimy unknown friend, I called to him, for I felt both hungry and thirsty. He was evidently not sleeping very heavily, for he awoke at my first call and came to the side of my bunk; but I at once perceived that it was not the man I had before seen; this fellow's voice and manner were surly in the extreme, and as he bent over me he gruffly demanded, in a scarcely comprehensible French patois, what I wanted. I answered, in French, that I should like something to eat and drink; whereupon he produced, from a sort of cupboard in the darkest corner of the forecastle, a bowl and a large can of soup, together with a wooden tray of flinty biscuit and an old iron spoon. Pouring a liberal quantity of the soup into the bowl, and plunging the spoon into it, he handed it to me, placed the bread barge within my reach, and again composed himself to sleep. The soup was quite cold, and its surface was covered with floating lumps of congealed grease; nevertheless, after rejecting the grease, I consumed the whole of the soup, together with about half a biscuit, and felt very much the better for it. By and by the watch was called. I heard the men swarming up from the 'tween-decks abaft the forecastle; and presently my pock-marked friend of the repulsive countenance but kindly eye, descended into the forecastle to the relief of the surly dog who had handed me the soup. I thought this would be a good opportunity to learn something with regard to the character of the craft on board which I found myself, and also to obtain an insight into the circumstances under which we were picked up. I therefore proceeded to put a few questions to the new-comer, by means of which I elicited the following information from him.

The vessel which had picked us up was the privateer schooner *Jean Bart*, of Morlaix, commanded by Captain Henri Renouf, an exceptionally brave and skilful seaman, it would appear, if the story of his successes, as told by René Ollivier, was to be believed. Indeed, if I understood the guileless René aright, it was chiefly, if not wholly due to these successes, or rather one result of them, the extreme short-handedness of the *Jean Bart*,

caused by the losses sustained in her recent engagements, that Captain Henri Renouf had troubled himself to rescue us in the first place, and afterwards to issue orders that every effort should be made to restore us to health and strength; it being his intention to make good some of his losses by enrolling us as members of his crew. A little further questioning on my part resulted in the discovery that we had been picked up some four hours previously to my return to consciousness; our boat having been sighted right ahead at daybreak after the springing up of the breeze that had followed a period of calm of unprecedented duration in the experience of those on board the *Jean Bart*. Eight of us had been found in the boat, of whom six still exhibited some faint signs of life, and these six had been domiciled in the schooner's fore-castle, and simply placed in charge of two of the crew—the vessel not carrying a surgeon—to recover or not as fate might decide. Upon learning from my friend René the date upon which we had been picked up, I made a little calculation, by which I arrived at the conclusion that I must have lain absolutely unconscious in the boat something like thirty hours, during which one of our number had mysteriously disappeared, probably by jumping overboard in a fit of delirium.

During my conversation with Ollivier, Dumaresq awoke and joined in; upon which, assisted by the repulsive-looking but really sympathetic French seaman, I contrived to get out of my bunk and reach a chest alongside Dumaresq's bunk; and I was much gratified to find that the gallant young fellow, although still terribly weak, was making satisfactory progress. Further research resulted in the discovery that those saved from the gig were, in addition to Dumaresq and myself, Tom Hardy, Peter Green, Henry Anstey, and Philip Sendell; all four of whom were thorough staunch British seamen, who, except when driven mad by hunger and thirst, were to be implicitly depended upon.

It was a very great relief to me to find that so many of us had survived; for, apart from other considerations, I foresaw that, if Captain Renouf's intentions towards us were such as Ollivier had stated them to be, complications were likely to arise of such a character that the strongest possible mutual support would be necessary to enable us to face them. The mere fact that this fellow, Renouf, had in so off-handed a manner arranged the destinies of six of his fellow-creatures, without even the formality of consulting them in the matter, rendered me exceedingly uneasy; such a proceeding seeming to indicate a headstrong, overbearing, exacting character, with which it would be exceedingly difficult to deal. Of course, so far as

Dumaresq was concerned, the arrangement was not so objectionable; he would probably be quite willing to work his passage to the next port. But with us who were English it was quite another matter. The worst that Renouf had a right to do was to treat us as prisoners of war; to impress us into an enemy's service would simply be an outrage. Yet it was not infrequently done, not only by the French, but also by our own countrymen. Before any further development was possible, however, it would be necessary for us to become well and strong again; and there was always the hope that before that time should have arrived the *Jean Bart* might fall in with an enemy and be captured.

This hope, however, was not destined to be fulfilled; and on the third day after the recovery of my senses, being once more well and strong enough to move about, I determined to take the bull by the horns forthwith; with which purpose I sent a message aft by Ollivier to Captain Renouf, expressing a desire to personally thank him for his rescue of myself and the survivors of my boat's crew, and to make arrangements for obtaining our parole. By way of reply to this I received a curt intimation that Captain Renouf was in his cabin, and that I was to proceed thereto forthwith.

In response to this summons I at once mounted to the deck for the first time, and, flinging a keen, hurried glance about me, found that I was on board a slashing schooner, some fifty or sixty tons bigger than the *Dolphin*. She was a tremendously beamy craft, flush-decked fore-and-aft, and was armed with ten twelve-pounders in her broadside batteries, with a thirty-two-pounder between her masts—a truly formidable craft of her kind. And it was evident, moreover, that she was manned in accordance with her armament, for the watch on deck, although I did not stay to count them, mustered fully forty men, as ruffianly-looking a set of scoundrels as I ever set eyes on. A glance over the side showed me that the vessel was a regular flier; for although there was but a moderate breeze blowing, and the craft was close-hauled, she was going along at a pace of fully nine knots. So smart a vessel, so heavily armed and manned, ought to have been the pride of her captain; but I could detect no traces of any such feeling, her decks being dark with dirt, while a general air of slovenliness pervaded the craft from stem to stern.

I was conducted aft to the companion by Ollivier, who whispered to me, just as I was about to descend:

"*Courage, mon ami!*"

That the man should have deemed such an exhortation necessary was the reverse of encouraging, for it seemed to indicate that, in his opinion, I was about to undergo some more or less trying ordeal, a suggestion that only too strongly confirmed my own forebodings. If, however, I was about to be involved in a difficulty, my first step was, manifestly, to ascertain its nature; so, making my way down the companion ladder, I knocked at a door which confronted me, and was immediately bidden, in French, to enter.

Turning the handle of the door and flinging it open, I obeyed, finding myself in a fine, roomy, well-lighted cabin, the beams of which, however, were so low that I could only stand upright when between them. The place was rather flashily decorated, with a good deal of gilding, and several crudely executed paintings in the panelling of the woodwork. A large mirror, nearly ruined by damp, surmounted a buffet against the fore-bulkhead, and the after-bulkhead was decorated with a trophy composed of swords, pistols, and long, murderous-looking daggers arranged in the form of a star. A massive mahogany table, occupying the centre of the cabin, reflected in its polished depths a handsome lamp of white, silvery-looking metal that swung in the skylight, and the locker underneath the trophy was occupied by a slight, youthful-looking, sallow-complexioned man, whose well-oiled hair clustered in coal-black ringlets all over his small, shapely head, while a pair of small, piercing black eyes flashed out from beneath black eyebrows that ran, unbroken, right across the root of the nose, and a set of large, even, pearl-white teeth gleamed through a well-kept, coal-black moustache and beard. The fellow was attired in a showy, theatrical-looking costume, consisting of blue cloth jacket, adorned with a double row of gilt buttons and a pair of bullion epaulettes upon the shoulders, over a shirt of white silk, open at the throat, a sword-belt of black varnished leather, fastened by a pair of handsome brass or gold clasps, served the double purpose of a support for his blue cloth trousers and a receptacle for a pair of pistols, handsomely mounted in silver. This was, of course, Captain Renouf; and a man who looked like, and afterwards proved to actually be, his brother sat beside him. This individual I rightly conjectured to be the chief mate of the *Jean Bart*. Both men were young, the captain being, perhaps, about four-and-twenty, while his brother would be about two years younger, and both would have been handsome but for the cruel, sinister expression of the eyes. They were ocean dandies of the first water; for, in addition to their showy garb—that of the junior being similar to his captain's, except that the epaulettes were lacking,—they both wore gold ear-rings, while

several apparently valuable rings flashed upon the rather dirty fingers of the senior officer.

The pair looked at me intently as I made my bow, and, ere I could speak a word, Captain Renouf accosted me in French.

"Well, my good fellow," said he, "pray who may you be?"

"My name is Bowen," I answered. "I am chief officer of the British privateer *Dolphin*, and I was in command of the boat, the occupants of which you so humanely rescued a few days ago. Permit me, monsieur, to express to you, without further delay, on behalf of myself and my fellow-sufferers, our most hearty thanks for—"

"And, pray, how came you and your fellow-sufferers to be adrift in that boat?" demanded Renouf, unceremoniously cutting short my expression of thanks. I could not help thinking that there was more than the suspicion of a mocking sneer in the tone in which he uttered the words "you and your fellow-sufferers". Moreover there was a distinct air of discourtesy in his manner of interrupting me, and a suggestion of antagonism in his flashing eyes that put me on my guard; so, curbing a very decided disposition to make a resentful retort, I answered:

"The gig was one of the boats of the late East Indiaman *Manilla*, which the *Dolphin* had recaptured from a French privateer named the *Tigre*, and which was afterwards set on fire by lightning and destroyed. I was prize-officer in charge of the *Manilla* at the time; hence my presence in one of her boats."

"And how came you, sir, to be chief officer on board a British privateer?" now demanded Renouf.

I could not, for the life of me, comprehend the drift of this question, but there was no mistaking the insolent intonation of it. I therefore answered, rather haughtily:

"Pardon me, sir, if I say that I cannot see what possible concern a Frenchman can have in such a matter as that which you have just referred to."

"You cannot, eh?" he retorted, with a sudden flash of temper. "Then I will explain to you, my fine fellow. I asked the question because I feel curious to know what induced a French citizen to become a renegade and take up arms against his own country. You are a Breton, sir. I recognise you as such by your unmistakable dialect. And if I am not greatly mistaken you hail

from Morlaix, in the streets of which town I am certain I have met that lanky carcase of yours hundreds of times. Nay, do not interrupt me! I will not have it—”

“But I must and will interrupt you, Captain Renouf,” I broke in, despite his efforts to talk me down. “What you assert is simply ridiculous, sir. No man in his senses would ever mistake my imperfect French for Breton or any other dialect than that of an Englishman. What your motive may be for endeavouring to persuade yourself that I am a fellow-countryman of your own I cannot guess; but I reject the suggestion with scorn. I am an Englishman, as you are certainly quite aware, and I insist upon being treated as such. It was my intention to have asked parole for myself and my four fellow-countrymen; but with a captain possessed of such extraordinary hallucinations it will probably be better for us to remain close prisoners.”

Renouf laughed disdainfully. “I have no doubt,” said he, “that such an arrangement would suit you admirably, but it will not suit me. Now I want you to understand me clearly. You and your ‘four fellow-countrymen’ are Frenchmen. Your clumsy attempt to pass yourselves off as Englishmen does not deceive me for a moment, nor do I believe it has really deceived that dolt Dumaresq, although he professes to have been temporarily taken in by you. You are all Frenchmen, however; that fact is indisputable. My brother here is as firmly convinced of it as I am; and, as France just now stands in need of the services of all her sons, it is my duty to see that you are made to serve her, willingly or unwillingly. But let me recommend you to render your service willingly; for if you do not it will be the worse for you. Now go on deck and turn to. And observe, my fine fellow, you will do well to recommend your ‘four fellow-countrymen’, as you are pleased to term them, to commence duty at once, and to behave themselves; for I learn that you have great influence with them, and I shall hold you responsible for any shortcomings on their part. Now, go!”

“Captain Renouf,” answered I, “I have listened to you patiently, and I understand that it is your intention to compel us five Englishmen to serve on board this ship. You can only do this by force, sir, and I warn you that if you dare to use force to either of us you shall suffer for it. You are certain to be captured by an English ship sooner or later, and the captain of that ship will not be slow to amply avenge any violence you may be foolhardy enough to resort to in your determination to compel five Englishmen to serve an enemy of their country.”

"So!" he ejaculated, starting to his feet in a frenzy of passion. "You dare me, do you, you insolent rascal? Very well. Let us see how far your courage will carry you!"

He struck a hand-bell furiously, and shouted "Gaspar!"

A man, evidently the steward, promptly made his appearance at the cabin door, and responded:

"Monsieur called?"

"I did," answered Renouf. "Go on deck and tell Pierre to bring three men and some lashing down into the cabin."

The steward disappeared, and, as he did so, Renouf whipped a pistol out of his belt and covered me with it.

"Now, Monsieur Englishman, since you insist upon being so considered," he said, "if you make the slightest show of resistance I will shoot you through the head. Do you comprehend?"

"Clearly," I answered. "But as I cannot fight all hands single-handed, and as I am not yet tired of my life, I shall not resist. You at present have me in your power, and, by the exercise of that power, can compel me to do your will. But you are laying a heavy debt upon me, Captain Renouf, a debt which I will not fail to pay off in full at the earliest opportunity."

"*Pouf!*" answered he scornfully; "a fig for your threats! I have always been able to take good care of myself hitherto, and I doubt not I shall always be equally able to do so."

Chapter Seventeen.

The true character of the Jean Bart becomes manifest.

At this moment Pierre, who turned out to be the boatswain of the ship, accompanied by the three other men, one of whom carried a length of ratline in his hand, came clattering down the companion ladder, and entered the cabin.

"Now, monsieur," continued Renouf to me, "will you go on deck and do your duty, or shall these men drag you there and

compel you to do it by seizing you up to the gangway and flogging you into obedience?"

"I will obey your orders, Captain Renouf," said I, "since you leave no alternative but that of being flogged, which I do not choose to submit to. But—"

"Well, but what?" sneered Renouf.

"Nothing at present," answered I, suddenly realising the absurdity as well as the imprudence of continuing to threaten while in so utterly helpless a condition.

"Aha, Monsieur Braggadocio!" answered Renouf; "so you are coming to your senses already, are you? It is well. Now you are beginning to exhibit a glimmer of common sense, which I hope will increase with reflection, and if it does I doubt not that we shall get on well enough together after all; especially as you will find that there is plenty of prize-money to be earned on board this ship. Now go forward and tell your mates that you have accepted service under me, and persuade them to do the same. I hope, for your sake, that you will have no trouble in so persuading them."

"I go, sir," replied I; "but I tell you, now, in the presence of these men, that I obey you under protest, and only because I do not choose to submit to the indignity of compulsion by mere superior brute force."

And so saying I turned and left the cabin, being escorted to the deck by Pierre and his three myrmidons.

I went right forward into the fore-castle and, finding my fellow-survivors there, told them all that had passed in the cabin, at which they expressed the utmost indignation; Dumaresq being as loud as the loudest of my companions in his denunciation of Renouf's conduct. I let them finish their growl, and then said:

"Well, lads, I have told you exactly what this fellow Renouf said, and how he acted. It is now for you to act, each according to what seems best to him; for although I have been ordered to persuade you to follow my example, I shall do nothing of the sort. Each man must act according to his own judgment, just as I did. It did not suit me to submit to the indignity of being flogged, and I therefore accepted the only alternative that was left to me, namely, to consent to serve aboard this ship. But I did so with several mental reservations, the nature of which I will communicate to you at some more convenient time."

As I said this, my gaze involuntarily turned in Dumaresq's direction. The poor fellow flushed up painfully and said:

"I hope, my dear Bowen, you have no suspicion that I will betray to this rascal—whom I blush to acknowledge as a fellow-countryman—anything that you may choose to say in my presence. Believe me, I fully appreciate all the difficulties of your position, and can well understand that you have felt yourself compelled to yield to circumstances which you found it impossible to control. But give me credit for believing that your surrender was not the base, unconditional surrender of a coward who preferred to turn traitor to his country rather than submit to a flogging. If I have read your character aright—and God knows I have been associated with you under circumstances that ought to have given me some insight into it—you have yielded to this man Renouf for some ulterior purpose of your own, which you intend to communicate to your comrades at the first fitting opportunity. Now, so far as I am concerned, I have not the same reasons that you have for objecting to take service in this ship, and I shall therefore volunteer. But I want you to understand that the accident of our happening to belong to two nations, at present unhappily at war with each other, is wholly insufficient to lessen in the slightest degree the personal friendship I entertain for you and these good fellows here, your fellow-countrymen. I am your and their friend now and for ever; and I want to make it plain to you that, short of absolute treachery to my country, you may count upon me to stand by you through thick and thin. You hesitate, and very rightly, too, to speak of your plans before me. It would be no advantage to you, and it might be embarrassing to me, were you to discuss them in my presence; but I have so little sympathy with Captain Renouf in his high-handed method of dealing with you that, were I to accidentally become acquainted with any portion of your intentions, I should feel quite justified in remaining silent about them. If the fellow is foolish enough to compel you to serve him against your will, he need feel no surprise at your taking an early opportunity to free yourselves from so galling a yoke. And now, in order that I may not be a restraint upon you, I will relieve you of my presence by going aft and volunteering. But believe and trust in my friendship always, even should circumstances assume such a character as to suggest a doubt of it."

So saying, he grasped the hand I offered him, wrung it heartily, and sprang up the ladder to the deck.

As soon as he was gone I translated to my four fellow-prisoners what he had said, and we then resumed our discussion of the situation. I told my companions that although I had consented to serve on board the *Jean Bart*, nothing should induce me to take up arms against my fellow-countrymen; that, on the contrary, if we should chance to fall in with a British ship, I was fully determined, by every means in my power, to frustrate Renouf's intentions, and to hamper and obstruct him in every possible way, and at all hazards; and that, if they felt disposed to accept service with a similar determination, it would be strange if five resolute, determined men like ourselves could not do something very material toward assisting in the capture of the schooner, and the safe lodgment of Monsieur Renouf aboard a British hulk. The men seemed to look at the matter in pretty much the same light that I did. They recognised, as I did, that Renouf was an unscrupulous rascal, likely to hesitate at little or nothing to gain his own headstrong will; they realised the utter futility of attempting to resist him, backed as he was by his whole crew; and, finally, they made up their minds to follow my example, recognising me as their actual leader, and heartily pledging themselves to be ready to act upon my initiative at a moment's notice, and to obey me to the death whenever a suitable opportunity should arise to translate our somewhat vague plans into action.

Having arrived at this understanding, I went aft and informed Captain Renouf that my comrades had consented, like myself under protest, to serve on board the *Jean Bart*; whereupon he ironically congratulated me upon my success—at which, nevertheless, I could see he was very much pleased—and gave orders that we were forthwith to be enrolled in the port watch, under his brother. We went on duty within the hour, were all placed in the same mess, and slept that night in that portion of the 'tween-decks devoted to the accommodation of the crew.

I was called upon to perform the duty of an able seaman; and ere long it became apparent that, having gained his way with us Englishmen, Renouf was now desirous to render our service as pleasant as possible to us. We were called upon only to do such work as is usually allotted to the highest grade of seamen before the mast, and in many ways trifling but none the less acceptable indulgences were shown to us. One of our duties was, of course, to take our regular trick at the wheel, and in this way I soon discovered that we were heading for West Indian waters.

It was on the fifth day after our submission to Renouf that, just after breakfast, a sail was made out from the mast-head, and the schooner's course was at once altered with the object of intercepting the strange ship, which was steering north. I was full of hope that the craft would turn out to be British, in which case there would almost certainly be a fight, and an opportunity would be afforded me of paying off part of the debt that I owed to Monsieur Renouf. But as the two craft neared each other, and the stranger's sails, and finally her hull, rose above the horizon, I was disappointed to discover that she was evidently a foreigner; and at length, in response to an exhibition of the French colours at the schooner's peak, she hoisted the Spanish ensign. Renouf, however, continued to bear down upon her; and presently the Spaniard, evidently growing alarmed at the menacing behaviour of the schooner, put up her helm and bore away before the wind, with the unmistakable intention of avoiding us if possible.

But a cart-horse might as well hope to gallop away from a thorough-bred racer as that ship to outsail the *Jean Bart*. The stranger was clearly a big, lumbering merchantman, built for the purpose of stowing the greatest possible amount of cargo in a hull of her dimensions. She had no pretensions whatever to speed, while the schooner was, as I have elsewhere said, exceptionally fast; it was not wonderful, therefore, that we rapidly overhauled her without an effort.

It was my impression that, as the Spaniard was probably homeward-bound from that part of the world toward which we were steering, Renouf was anxious to speak her and obtain what information he could with regard to the state of affairs generally in that quarter; and I was therefore not surprised at his persistent pursuit of the ship. But when later on in the day we had closed her to within gun-shot distance, and he began to fire into her, I certainly thought he was again carrying things with rather a high hand, and that, if he was not careful, he would probably get himself into serious trouble over the affair. Still it was no business of mine. The Spaniards, like the French, were at war with us, and if they chose to make war upon each other also it was not for me to object; on the contrary, any action calculated to produce a feeling of ill-will between the two nations could not fail to be of advantage to Great Britain. I therefore felt no qualms of conscience whatever when called upon to take my station at one of the guns, and did my duty with hearty good-will.

We continued firing at the Spaniard for about half an hour, in a very leisurely way, but with such deliberate aim that every shot struck her; and then, without firing a shot in return, the great hulking craft shortened sail and hove-to. Ten minutes later we, too, were hove-to within pistol-shot of the Spaniard's weather quarter, and we then had an opportunity to learn, by the gilt lettering on her stern, that she was the *Santa Theresa*, of Cadiz. The *Jean Bart's* three boats were at once lowered, and a party of about forty men, armed to the teeth, and led by Captain Renouf, his brother Gabriel, and young Dumaresq pushed off to take possession.

I thought this last a most extraordinary proceeding, France and Spain being then on friendly terms with each other; moreover, it at once disabused me of the impression that it was information only that Renouf was seeking. Still, it was no business of mine; and even had it been, that was certainly not the moment for me to interfere, surrounded as I was by some forty evil-looking ruffians, fully armed, and the schooner in charge of the second mate—the most evil-looking scoundrel of the lot, and, moreover, a man who had not attempted to conceal the fact that he intensely hated the very sight of us Englishmen.

The boats passed under the Spaniard's stern, and a few minutes later Renouf appeared upon her poop with his sword drawn, and waved a signal to Danton the second mate; whereupon a man was sent aloft to our royal-yard, with instructions to keep a sharp look-out all round the horizon, and to at once report the appearance of any strange sail that might perchance heave in sight.

For close upon four hours the two craft remained thus hove-to, upon opposite tacks, gradually drifting further apart, except when Danton saw fit to fall upon the schooner from time to time for the purpose of again closing with the Spaniard, never nearing her, however, closer than half a mile to leeward; and during at least two hours of this time not a trace of life was to be discovered on board the bigger ship. At length, however, a slight movement became observable on board the *Santa Theresa*; and presently we saw that tackles were being got up on the main-topmast-stay and the lower yard-arms. The Spaniard's boats were then hoisted out and lowered from the davits, until all of them appeared to be in the water, when the long-boat was hauled alongside to leeward, abreast the main hatchway; half a dozen men clambered down the side into her; and, after a short interval which was probably employed in

taking off the hatches, it became apparent that they were hoisting cargo up out of the *Santa Theresa's* hold, certain selected bales and packages of which were from time to time carefully lowered down into the long-boat; a sight which went far toward confirming certain dreadful suspicions that had been slowly taking shape within my mind from the moment when I had seen Renouf, with his drawn sword, upon the Spanish ship's poop.

We now once more filled upon the schooner, and this time closed the bigger ship to leeward within less than a cable's length, when we once more hove-to, on the same tack as our neighbour, and a powerful tackle was then got up on our lower yard-arm, and another on the triatic-stay.

By the time that these preparations were complete, the long-boat was loaded as deeply as was prudent, and she was at once cast off and taken in tow by four men in one of the schooner's boats, the next largest of the *Santa Theresa's* boats taking her place, for the reception of further cargo. The weather was at this time quite fine, with a very moderate breeze blowing, and so little swell running that it was not worth speaking about; yet the long-boat was no sooner fairly in tow than it became apparent that those in charge of her were in difficulties; and, but for the prompt measures taken by Danton, she would have missed the schooner altogether and gone wallowing away to leeward. With our assistance, however, she was got alongside, after a fashion, and brought to the schooner's lee gangway, when it became apparent that those in charge of her were so helplessly drunk that they could hardly stand. Yet, somehow, they managed, with assistance, to clamber up our low side and reach the deck; when, as well as their drunken state would allow, they forthwith proceeded, in ribald language, to entertain their more sober shipmates with a tale of gross, wanton, cruel outrage, perpetrated on board the Spaniard, that made my blood boil with indignation, and caused me, thick-skinned sailor as I was, to blush at the thought that the perpetrators were, like myself, human. I noticed that Danton listened with greedy ears to the foul recital; and by and by, when the long-boat's cargo had been roused out of her and struck down our main hatchway, he turned the schooner over to the carpenter, and, taking four fresh and sober hands with him, proceeded on board the *Santa Theresa*, leaving the four drunken ruffians behind.

Shortly after the departure of the long-boat, one of the cutters came drifting down to us, loaded to her gunwale, and the four intoxicated scoundrels in charge of her amply verified the

revolting story told by their predecessors, adding such details as abundantly confirmed my suspicions that the *Jean Bart* was no privateer, but an out-and-out pirate of the deepest dye. Their tale so inflamed the sober portion of our crew, who had remained on board the schooner, that at one moment it looked very much as though they were about to throw off all the trammels of discipline and obedience, and proceed forthwith on board the Spaniard, to participate in the saturnalia still in progress there; and it was only by the production of a lavish allowance of rum, and a promise from the carpenter that they should all have their turn on board the doomed ship, that they could be restrained from heaving the cutter's cargo overboard—instead of hoisting it out and passing it down the hatchway,—seizing the boat, and proceeding on board the Spaniard *en masse*. As for me, it may be imagined what a raging fever of indignation and fury I was thrown into by what I had heard; and it was made all the more unendurable by the circumstance that I was utterly powerless to interfere. For what could I and my four fellow-countrymen say or do to restrain some eighty lawless ruffians animated by all the vilest and most evil passions that the human breast ever harboured? Absolutely nothing! not even though we should resolve to lay down our lives in the attempt. We might destroy some twenty or thirty of the Frenchmen, perhaps, before we ourselves went under, but that would in nowise serve the unhappy Spaniards, who would still be at the mercy of the ruthless survivors. A thousand schemes suggested themselves to me, but there was not a practical one among them all, not one that offered the remotest prospect of success; and, with a bitter execration at our helplessness, I was at length obliged to admit that things must take their course, so far as we were concerned. But, although helpless to intervene just then, I saw that there was a possibility of the Frenchmen's excesses bringing retribution in their train. For every man who had thus far come from the Spanish ship had been almost helplessly drunk; and I saw no especial reason why the rest should not be in the same condition. And, if they were, what might not five resolute, reckless Englishmen be able to do?

I had observed that, when the carpenter found himself compelled to bribe what I may term the sober half of the schooner's crew to remain aboard, by producing a quantity of rum, my four English shipmates exhibited no backwardness in accepting and swallowing the very liberal allowance that had been offered to them; I also accepted mine; and, upon the pretence of being thirsty and therefore desiring to add water to it, I took it aft to the scuttle-butt, deftly hove the spirit

overboard, and filling the pannikin with water, drank the contents with the greatest apparent gusto. And now, as certain vague possibilities began to present themselves to my mind, I contrived to draw Hardy, Green, Anstey, and Sendell away from the crowd of excited, chattering Frenchmen that swarmed in the waist and around the hatchway; and, getting them down into the deserted forecabin, I briefly and rapidly explained to them all that I had discovered relative to the real character of the *Jean Bart* and her crew, as well as the nature of the doings aboard the Spanish ship; and, having thus wrought them up to a proper pitch of indignation, I unfolded to them my somewhat hazy plans, and inquired whether they were disposed to aid me in them. To my delight, I found that they were with me, heart and soul. They had never very greatly relished their compulsory service aboard the schooner, and now that they were made aware of her true character and that of her crew, they professed themselves ready and eager to do anything I might propose in order to escape the thralldom of a continuation of such service and companionship. Whereupon I bade them accept all the drink that might be offered them, but to religiously abstain from swallowing another drop of it, and to hold themselves in readiness to act under my leadership whenever I might deem that the favourable moment for such action had arrived.

Chapter Eighteen.

We turn the tables upon Monsieur Renouf.

It was drawing well on toward sunset when Renouf, having apparently appropriated all the most valuable portions of the Spaniard's cargo that he could readily lay hands on, began to clear his disorderly rabble of a crew out of the ship, sending them aboard the schooner, a boatload at a time, and, to my surprise, using the Spanish boats, as well as his own, for this purpose. Meanwhile, the stories told by the men who had from time to time come from the Spanish ship had had the effect of gradually enticing the more sober half out of the schooner and on board the *Santa Theresa*, until the *Jean Bart* had at length been left practically in possession of us five Englishmen, and some thirty Frenchmen, the whole of whom were more or less helplessly drunk. And, this being the state of things on board the schooner, it would have been a comparatively easy matter for us five to have overpowered the Frenchmen, who were lying or staggering about the decks, and to have made off with the vessel; but not even to secure our liberty did I consider that I

should have been justified in leaving Renouf and the bulk of his ruffians on board the *Santa Theresa*, to wreak his vengeance on the hapless crew and passengers. At length pretty nearly all the Frenchmen, save Renouf, his brother, and some half a dozen more, had rejoined the schooner, and I perceived with intense satisfaction that, although they were, without exception, in an almost helpless state of intoxication, every man brought with him at least a couple of bottles of wine or spirits; some men brought as many as half a dozen with them; and, at a hint from me, Anstey and his shipmates zealously assisted in getting these precious bottles safely up over the ship's side for their owners, who at once took them below and stowed them away in their hammocks. Among the earliest of the main body of arrivals, so to speak, came Dumaresq; he was perfectly sober, and I was gratified to observe that his countenance wore a quite unmistakable expression of fiery indignation, in which I thought I could also trace indications of horror and disgust. He caught my eye for an instant, as he sprang in over the rail; threw up his hands expressively, laid his finger on his lips, and vanished below.

Only the schooner's gig and the Spanish ship's pinnace now remained to join, and I had found time to observe that the latter was being loaded with a number of very small but apparently heavy packages, the nature of which I shrewdly suspected, for I had seen something very like them before. At length the operation of loading the pinnace appeared to be complete. There was a pause of about a quarter of an hour, and then the gig started for the schooner, with the pinnace in tow. As soon as I saw these two boats coming I directed my four shipmates to go below and turn into their hammocks, as at least half the Frenchmen had done, and to remain there, if possible, until I should call them, at the same time warning them not to touch a drop of liquor, as they valued their lives. In a few minutes the two boats were alongside, and I saw that my suspicion as to the nature of the small packages was correct. There were just forty of them, weighing about one hundred pounds each; each package was carefully sewn up in raw hide, and I knew that these small but exceedingly heavy packages were so many gold ingots! So the *Jean Bart* had made a very handsome haul, apart from the probably valuable bales that had come up out of the Spaniard's hold. As Renouf and his brother came up over the side I observed that their faces were flushed, as with excitement, or wine, or both, and their voices were thick and husky, but neither of them was what might be called intoxicated. As they turned to go aft to the cabin the brothers glanced at the Spanish ship, and the elder gave utterance to a

brutal jest that made my hands tingle to take him by the throat and heave him overboard. But I seldom permit my passion to conquer prudence, and I allowed him to go, promising myself that his unhappy victims should be amply avenged in due time. Alas! even then I did not know the full measure of the villain's infamy, or I should have cast prudence to the winds, and dared everything for immediate freedom of action. They went below for a few minutes, and then returned to the deck to watch the trans-shipment of the gold, standing close to the gangway, and execrating in unmeasured terms the incapacity of the drunken mob who were performing the operation. For my own purpose I also assumed the demeanour of semi-intoxication, and accordingly came in for my full share of abuse. The gold, as it was hoisted on deck, was passed down into the cabin, and when it had all been got safely aboard the schooner, the pinnacle was passed astern and made fast to the rest of the Spanish boats, when, to my astonishment, we filled and made sail with the *Santa Theresa's* boats in tow!

For some time I was puzzled to divine what could possibly be Renouf's motive in taking away the Spanish boats, for they could be of no use or value whatever to us. There was no room for them on deck or at the schooner's davits, and I could hardly imagine that a man like Renouf would seriously contemplate the idea of attempting to tow them across the Atlantic. It was while I was marvelling at this extraordinary eccentricity, as I considered it, that I happened to allow my gaze to rest abstractedly on the Spaniard that still remained hove-to, and as I gazed it dawned upon me that a subtle change was taking place in the appearance of the vessel. At first I could not satisfy myself at all as to the nature of the change, although I was convinced of its reality, but suddenly I understood it all. The craft was deeper in the water than before; she was gradually, almost imperceptibly, settling down, and already the rise and fall of her upon the swell was becoming characterised by that heavy sluggishness of movement that marks a water-logged ship. The scoundrels had scuttled her—I could understand it all now—and were taking away the boats in order that the miserable passengers and crew might by no possibility escape to tell the tale of Renouf's piratical behaviour. With this conviction strong upon me, I made my way below, and at length found Dumaresq, sitting upon a chest, with his face buried in his hands, and wearing every appearance of the most abject melancholy.

"Dumaresq," exclaimed I, in a fierce whisper, grasping him by the shoulder and shaking him almost savagely in my agitation;

"rouse yourself, man, and listen to me! I want to ask you a question or two. You have been aboard the Spanish ship, and were an eye-witness, I suppose, of some at least of the deeds of Renouf and his crew. I want to hear the particulars, as briefly as possible, and I also want to know what is your feeling in the matter."

He removed his hands from his face and looked up at me, and even in the dim uncertain light of the 'tween-decks I could read the horror, sorrow, and indignation in his eyes.

"Bowen, my friend," he replied in low, cautious tones, "do not ask me for I cannot tell you; I could not find words to describe the scenes of which I have been a helpless, horrified eye-witness this day. Everything may be summed up in a few words: Renouf and his crew are pirates of the most ruthless character; men who absolutely revel in wickedness of the vilest description, who take positive delight in inflicting the most horrible indignities upon those who unfortunately happen to fall into their power, who gloat over the unavailing tears and entreaties of their victims, and who scoff at the mere mention of the word 'mercy'. Picture to yourself the very worst that you have ever heard or read of piratical atrocities, and you will be able to arrive at a very accurate conception of the horrors of which that unfortunate ship was the theatre to-day. And I, my friend, I was compelled to look on, powerless to mitigate a single horror; nay, worse, my remonstrances were jeered at, and if I ventured to intercede in behalf of a victim, some additional insult or barbarity was at once inflicted upon the unhappy creature. And these are the fiends into whose power we have fallen. It would have been a thousand times better had we perished in the gig!"

"Is that your view of the matter?" I exclaimed contemptuously. "Then I can only say, Monsieur Dumaresq, that I have been mistaken in you. Man, man!" I continued angrily; "what are you thinking about? Are you going to crouch here, dumb, abject, and inactive, like a whipped hound, instead of bestirring yourself and helping me to put an end to the career of these fiends and bring them to justice, to say nothing of the possibility of saving those unhappy wretches on board the Spanish ship, unless I am to understand from you that they have all been murdered in cold blood."

"No, no, it was not quite so bad as all that," he answered, looking at me with a bewildered air; "bloodshed there certainly was, and cruel torture to extract the secret of the hiding-place of the gold, but no life was actually taken, so far as I know.

What do you mean by your talk of 'saving' the unhappy wretches on board the Spanish ship?"

"I mean," said I impressively, "that the ship has been scuttled, and is now surely but slowly sinking, while Renouf has all her boats in tow, in order that there may be no possible chance of escape for anybody on board her."

"Merciful heaven! it cannot be!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet, and gripping me by the arm. "Why, nobody but a fiend incarnate would dream of doing such a thing!"

"Then," said I, "Renouf is a fiend incarnate; and that is an additional reason for putting an end to his career at once; for, as surely as that you are standing here, he has not only dreamed of doing such a thing, but has actually done it."

"Horrible, horrible!" exclaimed Dumaresq, smiting his forehead with his hand as he stared at me, still more than half incredulous. "But what can we do, my friend; what can we do? There are but six of us, at most, against more than eighty!"

"True," I answered; "but if each of those six is as resolute as I am prepared to be, we may prove sufficient for my purpose. Now, listen to me. This is my plan. Look around you. There is not a man below here, save ourselves, but is nearly or quite helplessly drunk, and those on deck are little or no better. We must divide ourselves into three parties of two each, and each party must tackle one of these drunken wretches at a time, one of us clapping a gag between his jaws, while the other whips a lashing round him, and makes him fast, hands and feet. In this way everybody below here may be secured. Then, leaving two of our number here to deal with any others who may come down, the other four must go aft and seize Renouf and his brother; and when we have made them safe, we must tackle Danton. This done, our next move must be to get the schooner round, and return to the Spanish ship, and while we are making our way back we must go round the decks with a belaying-pin apiece, and simply knock the senses out of all who attempt to oppose us. It will not be a difficult matter, for I do not believe that there is a man on board, excepting ourselves and perhaps Renouf and his brother, capable of taking care of himself."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Dumaresq; "but it is a desperate scheme, and I do not believe that anybody but a Briton would have thought of it, much less talked of it so coolly as you have done. But, Bowen, my friend, dare we attempt it? Is there the remotest chance of our being successful?"

"There is every chance, if we are but resolute," I answered, a little impatiently. "But, of course," I continued, "you are not called upon to join us if—"

"Nay, nay," he interrupted, "you shall never say that Anatole Dumaresq flinched when desperate work had to be done. I am with you, my friend, heart and soul. Let me but clearly understand what is to be done, and you shall have no chance to say that I did not do my fair share. There is my hand upon it."

I silently grasped his extended hand, and then went to the hammocks in which Hardy and his mates were pretending to sleep, and told them to tumble out at once. This they did, when I explained to them very briefly what I proposed to do. Having made my meaning clear, we rejoined Dumaresq, and without further ado the six of us seized a number of jackets, trousers, and other clothing that had been hung to the bulkheads and beams, and unceremoniously cut them into suitable strips, which we rolled into gags.

On board the *Jean Bart* the hammocks were never taken on deck, as they are on board a man-o'-war—the schooner not being fitted with a hammock-rail,—but were simply laced up every morning. Each hammock was consequently fitted with a good stout lacing, which I thought would admirably serve as a lashing for my prisoners.

Having provided ourselves with as many gags as we could conveniently stow in our pockets, we next stationed ourselves in couples alongside three occupied hammocks, and while one of the twain loosely and quickly passed the lacing through the eyelet-holes the other stood by with the gag, which, at the proper moment, was slipped into the victim's mouth and lashed securely, the hammock lacing at the same moment being hauled taut and made fast; and in this way each prisoner was silently and effectually secured. It took the six of us fully twenty minutes to secure everybody below—to the number of sixty-three,—as some of them had to be gagged first and afterwards lashed into their hammocks; but the work was done effectually, noiselessly, and without a hitch, every one of the Frenchmen proving to be too completely intoxicated to offer the slightest resistance worthy of the name.

This done, I crept up on deck, staggering and stumbling, with the most vacant expression of face that I could assume, and generally imitating, as nearly as I could, the gait and appearance of a drunken man, for the benefit of whosoever might happen to be in a condition to take intelligent notice of

me. Reeling and staggering to the fore-rigging, I clutched at and hung on to a belaying-pin, and looked about me fore-and-aft. The deck was occupied by some twenty men or so, some of whom were asleep in the lee scuppers, while others, in little groups of two and three, hung over the bulwarks, staring idiotically at the white foam that swept aft from the schooner's keen cut-water; and four, who had probably assumed the duty of looking out, staggered and lurched in pairs, holding each other on their legs, to-and-fro between the windlass and the fore-rigging, occasionally indulging in an ineffectual attempt to exchange remarks. So far, all was right; nobody here seemed capable of giving us the slightest trouble. In fact, discipline was for the time being at an end, lawlessness reigned supreme, everybody was his own master, and the schooner was practically left to take care of herself. Danton, however, was in charge of the deck, and although he was a trifle unsteady in his walk, I could see that he had his wits pretty well about him and would have to be somewhat carefully tackled if we wished to secure him without giving the alarm to Renouf and his brother, both of whom, I took it, were below. Astern of us, or rather about a point and a half on our starboard quarter, and some four miles distant, lay the Spaniard, still hove-to, her brasswork and the glass of her sky-lights and scuttles flashing redly in the last rays of the setting sun as she laboured over the ridges of the low swell; and I was both startled and horrified to observe how deep she had sunk into the water during the comparatively short time that I had been below. It was clear enough that if the unhappy people aboard her were to be rescued there was not a moment to lose; I therefore staggered aft and, approaching Danton with drunken solemnity, touched my forehead and, wavering upon my legs and speaking thickly, asked him to come for'ard and down below and tell me whether he could smell fire. The scoundrel's face blanched at the word, as he probably pictured to himself the frightful predicament of all hands—himself included—should my suggestion prove true; then, without a word, he hastened forward to the hatchway, with me at his heels, and went stumbling down the steep ladder. As he reached the bottom I flung myself upon him, clasping him round the body and arms, and lifted him off his feet, at the same time singing out to Hardy to gag him; and in another minute we had him securely bound, hand and foot, and lashed hard and fast into a hammock.

"So far, well!" I exclaimed, as I dragged him unceremoniously away to a dark corner. "We have now but to secure Renouf and his brother, and the schooner is ours. Hardy, Green, and Sendell, come you aft with me, providing yourselves with a

belaying-pin each on the way; and you, Anstey, will keep Mr Dumaresq company on deck, mounting guard over the companion, to prevent anyone going below, or to knock down and secure anyone who may escape us and attempt to reach the deck. Our duty is very simple; four of us will enter the cabin; and while Hardy and I attempt to secure Renouf and his brother, the other two will stand by to assist, in the event of either of us becoming disabled by a pistol bullet. Come along, my hearties."

So saying, I led my little party aft. At the head of the companion ladder Dumaresq and the man Anstey came to a halt, the former engaging the drunken helmsman in conversation, while the remaining four of us stole down the ladder, bare-footed, and noiseless as cats. I had already mentally arranged my method of procedure; so, whispering to Hardy that he was to tackle the chief mate, while I would look after Renouf, I boldly knocked at the cabin door. A command to enter, given in rather a drowsy, peevish tone of voice, was the immediate response, whereupon I flung open the door and passed into the cabin closely followed by Hardy.

Renouf and his brother occupied a locker each on opposite sides of the cabin; and it was quite apparent that they had both been indulging in a nap, which I had rudely broken in upon. They were in the act of changing from a reclining to a sitting posture, yawning and stretching as they did so, when I entered the cabin.

"Captain Renouf," began I, as I advanced toward him, "I have taken the liberty to—"

My little ruse was, however, unavailing; the ruffian seemed to instinctively and immediately divine my purpose, and in a flash he had whipped a pistol and a long knife—the blade of which I noticed was smeared with blood—from his belt, and levelled the former straight at my head. There was no need for further words between us; nor was there time for hesitation; so, quickly ducking my head, I sprang upon him like lightning, and seized him by both wrists at the very instant that his pistol exploded; the bullet grazing the left side of my head, and neatly clipping off a lock of my hair. The fellow was as lithe as an eel in my hands, and made the most desperate efforts to stab me with his long, murderous-looking knife; but I had him fast in so powerful a grip that, after a furious struggle of a few seconds, he dropped both his weapons with a gasp of pain, my clutch having, as it presently appeared, forced both his wrists from their sockets. To snatch the remaining pistol from his belt with

my right hand, while I shifted the grip of my left to his throat, was the work of but a single instant; and I then turned to see how Hardy was faring with his antagonist. He had apparently been less fortunate than myself, for his cheek was laid open by a long gash from the chief mate's knife, which, even as I turned my head, again descended and buried itself in Hardy's shoulder. The smart of this second wound seemed to fairly rouse my shipmate, and before I could do anything to help him his ponderous fist darted out with the force of a six-pound shot, catching the miserable Corsican fair in the centre of the face and dashing him backwards, with a shriek of pain, across the table. This blow settled the affair; there was no more fight left in either of the brothers—indeed I had unconsciously gripped my prisoner's throat so tightly, while watching the termination of the struggle between the other two, that his tongue and eyeballs were protruding, and he was already going black in the face. So we securely pinioned the precious pair, lashing their arms and legs together, and, bundling each into his own cabin, locked the doors, the keys of which I slipped into my pocket. This done, I helped myself, from the trophy upon the after-bulkhead of the cabin, to weapons enough for our entire party; found Gaspar, the steward, in his pantry, where I lashed him fast and locked him in; and then the four of us hastened on deck to ascertain what effect, if any, had been produced by the pistol-shot fired in the cabin upon the small residue of the crew who had not yet utterly succumbed to the stupefying influence of their immoderate potations.

Chapter Nineteen.

The fate of the Santa Theresa.

Upon rejoining Dumaresq, I learned from him that the pistol-shot fired in the cabin had attracted only the most casual and momentary notice of the few Frenchmen on deck; the majority of them, indeed, scarcely rousing themselves sufficiently to do more than merely turn their heads to send a single inquiring glance aft. This was good news, as, although the schooner was now to all intents and purposes our own, there were few enough of us to navigate her, and I was most anxious that those few should not be weakened by possible injuries in a struggle to secure full and complete possession. That full and complete possession, however, it was absolutely necessary to secure at once, if anything was to be done toward rescuing the unhappy Spaniards on board the fast-sinking *Santa Theresa*; so

Dumaresq and I went forward and, by dint of a little good-humoured force, succeeded in persuading the remainder of the Frenchmen to go below, where we secured them without much difficulty. This done, we at once brought the schooner to the wind, and proceeded to beat up toward the Spanish ship, which we could just make out in the rapidly deepening dusk of the tropical evening. I carefully noted her bearing and distance; and then, Dumaresq taking the wheel, the rest of us went to work to make our prisoners permanently secure. Fortunately for us, Renouf's foresight enabled us to do this very effectually, he having apparently recognised that circumstances might possibly arise rendering it important that he should possess the means to reduce a large number of men to absolute helplessness; for which purpose he had provided himself with an ample supply of irons, which now proved most useful to us. We lost no time in clapping these irons upon the hands and legs of the Frenchmen, thus rendering it impossible for them to give us the slightest trouble upon their recovery from their drunken debauch; and, having made all perfectly secure, our next business was to restore the cook and steward to sobriety, by subjecting them to a liberal douche of salt-water, and to set them to work to prepare us a meal, of which we began to feel that we stood in need.

The task of effectually securing the whole of our prisoners occupied a considerable amount of time; so that when it was at length completed to my satisfaction the night had long since fallen, and we had completely lost sight of the Spanish ship, although Dumaresq had kept his eye upon her as long as possible. We had brought the schooner to the wind on the starboard tack, in the first instance, and we held on upon this tack until I found, by means of a simple little diagram, drawn to scale upon a piece of paper, that we could fetch her on the next tack when we hove the schooner round. But my hopes of being able to rescue the Spaniards were fast fading away, for the wind had evinced a decided disposition to drop with the setting of the sun; and when we at length tacked to fetch the spot where we expected to find the *Santa Theresa*, the schooner was going through the water at a speed of barely four knots. And, according to my reckoning, the ship was just that distance from us; so that it would occupy us another hour to fetch her, and I was exceedingly doubtful whether she would remain afloat so long. Indeed, I greatly feared that she had foundered already, for the night, although dark, was clear. The stars were shining brilliantly from zenith to horizon, and it appeared to me that if she was still afloat we ought to be able to see the blur of her canvas against the sky. But although I searched the horizon

from broad on the one bow to broad on the other, using for the purpose an exceptionally fine night-glass that I found in Renouf's cabin, I was unable to make her out.

Once or twice, it is true, I thought I had caught her right ahead, but it unfortunately happened that the portion of sky in that quarter was bare of stars over a space very considerably larger than would have been covered by the ship's canvas, and consequently I was without the assurance that would have been afforded me had the faint, dusky appearance that I took to be her sails alternately eclipsed and exposed a star. But I afterwards had reason to believe that I had really seen her, for when we had arrived within about a mile of the spot where I supposed her to be, a faint, wailing cry, as of people in the last extremity of despair, came pealing distinctly to us across the black water, and about a quarter of an hour later we suddenly found ourselves among a quantity of floating oars, buckets, hatches, and other articles that had undoubtedly belonged to the Spaniard. The presence of these articles proved conclusively that the unfortunate ship had gone down, and the cry that we had heard was doubtless the last despairing cry of her hapless, helpless passengers and crew. Thus to the crime of piracy Renouf had added the far worse one of wholesale murder, for Dumaresq asserted that, according to his estimate, the number of passengers and crew together on board the *Santa Theresa* could not have fallen much, if anything, short of a hundred. We immediately hove the schooner to, and Dumaresq, with my four English shipmates, at once shoved off in a boat to search among the wreckage for possible survivors, but not one was found; which is not to be wondered at, for it afterwards transpired that Renouf had driven the Spanish seamen below and battened them down, while he had lashed the officers and passengers hand and foot and locked them into the cabins the last thing before scuttling the ship!

We remained hove-to until past midnight, and then, having failed to find even so much as a floating body, sorrowfully filled away, and shaped a course for the West Indies, it being my intention to hand the whole crew over to the authorities upon a charge of piracy.

A few days later, as we were running down the trade-wind, shortly after mid-day, we sighted ahead a whole fleet of large ships steering pretty nearly the same course as ourselves. They were under royals, with studding-sails set on both sides, and despite the fact that they were so much bigger than ourselves, we overhauled them so rapidly that by sunset we had brought

them hull-up, and had neared them so closely that we were not only able to identify them as line-of-battle ships, but, with the aid of Renouf's splendid telescope, were able to read several of the names emblazoned upon their sterns. We made out such names as *Argonauta*, *España*, *Pluton*, *Terrible*, *Bucentaure*, *San Rafael*, and others, by means of which Dumaresq was able to identify some of them as ships that had been blockaded in the port of Toulon by Lord Nelson. Others were manifestly Spanish ships. Their names and appearance generally testified to that fact, and it therefore looked very much as though Vice-admiral Villeneuve had somehow contrived to evade the British fleet, and, having effected a junction with a Spanish fleet, was making the best of his way to the West Indies to work what damage might be within his power upon our colonies and our commerce in that quarter of the globe. There were twenty sail of them altogether. The fact that so formidable a fleet of our enemies was ranging the Atlantic and steering a course that would take them to some of the most valuable of Britain's possessions in the western hemisphere was important news indeed; and I reconnoitred the fleet as closely as I dared, contriving, before the daylight faded, to ascertain the name, and approximately the power, of every ship. They did not deign to take the slightest notice of us, beyond firing a shot or two at us whenever we ventured within range. So when darkness set in I bore away to the southward sufficiently to give the flank ship a berth of about four miles, when I crowded sail upon the schooner and ran past them, dropping them out of sight before sunrise next morning.

Despite the fact that we were so short-handed, we continued to carry on, night and day, arriving at Port Royal on the morning of the eighth day after sighting the combined fleet.

My first task was to seek out the Admiral, whom I expected to find at his *Pen* on the slope of the hill at the back of the town of Kingston; so no sooner was our anchor down than I engaged a negro boatman to take me up the harbour. Arrived at Kingston, I procured a vehicle, and, driving to the Pen, was fortunate enough to catch the great man just as he was about to sit down to breakfast. The announcement that I was the bearer of important intelligence relating to the enemy secured my immediate admission to his presence, and, despite the fact that I was only a privateersman, the genial old seadog accorded me a hearty welcome, and insisted upon my sitting down to table with him directly he had elicited from me the fact that I had not yet broken my fast. He was, of course, profoundly interested in the intelligence that I was able to furnish him, relative to the

presence of a combined French and Spanish fleet in the Atlantic, my information being the first that had reached him of the fact, and he was good enough to say that, in hastening to him with the news, I had rendered a service of the utmost importance to my country. Scarcely less interested was he in the narration of my adventures from the time of the abandonment of the *Manilla* to the moment of the capture of the *Jean Bart*. He complimented me highly upon my conduct throughout, and, while promising to immediately relieve me of the charge of my prisoners, incidentally expressed his regret that I had not selected the navy as my profession. I answered him that I was but an obscure individual, with no influence or patronage whatever at my command, and that, therefore, had I entered the navy, I should probably never have been allowed to rise in my profession, the influence and patronage which I lacked causing other and more fortunate ones to be promoted over my head. His reply was characteristic.

"Influence! patronage!" he exploded. "Ay, sir, you speak truly; there is too much of it altogether. It amounts to a very serious drawback and injury to the service in many ways. But, as for you, and men like you, you do not require either influence or patronage. You possess the best of all influence in this," lightly touching the hilt of my sword, "and it is a thousand pities that greater facilities are not afforded to men of your kidney for entrance into the service. But perhaps the profits derivable from successful privateering outweigh your patriotism, and you would rather be as you are than become the wearer of His Majesty's livery?"

"You are mistaken, sir," answered I hotly. "To serve on His Majesty's quarter-deck would be the height of my ambition, but I confess I prefer my present position, as commander of a privateer to that of a warrant-officer aboard a man-o'-war."

He answered me with a "Umph!" which afforded me no clue whatever to his opinion of my outspoken reply; and, my business with him being at an end, I took my leave.

"Have you any engagement for to-night?" he asked, extending his hand very cordially. And upon my answering that I had not, he said: "Then come and dine with me; seven sharp. I want to see a little more of you."

Of course I gladly accepted so flattering an invitation, and then hurried away to appoint an agent and return to the schooner.

I was anxious to get to sea again as quickly as possible, for I looked upon the loss of the *Manilla* as so much leeway, and a very serious amount too, that could not be too speedily made up. But I foresaw that my chief difficulty in so doing would arise from my lack of a crew, and how to scrape together a decent complement in a small town like Kingston I knew not, for I was fully aware that our men-o'-war kept the place pretty well swept of men. I was therefore greatly pleased when, having called upon the individual who had been recommended to me by the Admiral as an agent, he informed me, upon the conclusion of my business proper with him, that he knew a man who he believed would be willing, for a consideration, to find me as many good men as I might require. I at once asked for the address of this person, but was informed that it would be utterly useless for me, a total stranger, to call upon him, as he would most certainly decline to treat with me; but that if I felt disposed to leave the matter in his, the agent's, hands, he would do his best for me. I thought I understood pretty well what this meant. The system of impressment had done more than anything else to render our navy unpopular, and men were constantly deserting whenever and wherever they found a chance. And when they had once succeeded in making good their escape from the ship on board which they had been compelled to serve, their best chance of safety from recapture lay in getting to sea as quickly as possible, until which they were perforce obliged to lie in close hiding. This state of affairs soon produced a set of men known as "crimps", who kept boarding-houses for the especial accommodation and concealment of seamen who either had deserted from their ships, or who, having been paid off, were anxious to find other employment without the risk of impressment while openly looking for it. These crimps were to be found in every British seaport, abroad as well as at home, and a very good thing they made of it, what with their exorbitant charges for board and lodging on the one hand, and, on the other, the premiums or head-money that they received from ship-masters for the supply of men. It was, of course, to their interest to be loyal to the men, and hence they hedged themselves and their houses about with so many safeguards against undesirable intrusion that it became a matter of almost impossibility to approach them except through certain channels. I suspected that my agent was in touch with one or more of these men, and although I thoroughly hated the system, which was nothing short of the most audacious robbery, both of the unfortunate men whom it professed to befriend, and of the ship-masters who were compelled to avail themselves of it, my prospects of procuring a crew by any other means were so remote that I

unwillingly assented to my agent's suggestion, stipulating only that I should see the men and have the option of refusing such as I deemed unsuitable. And with this understanding the agent undertook to do his best to find me at least forty thoroughly good men.

This important matter put in train, I hastened back on board the schooner, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing Renouf and his scoundrel crew passed over the side into the boats that were to convey them to the prison-hulk. I had the still greater satisfaction of learning, not very long afterwards, that Renouf, his brother, and half a dozen more of the party had been hanged as pirates upon the evidence of Dumaresq, myself, and the other survivors of the gig's crew. This, however, is anticipating my story somewhat.

That same night I dined with the Admiral, and had the honour of meeting the Governor and some half-dozen more of the principal personages of the island. I was rather astonished, I must admit, at the perfect equanimity with which my portentous tidings had been received. The Admiral had, of course, had a busy day of it in preparing and sending off despatches to the other islands belonging to the crown, as well as in arranging for the defence of our possessions generally; but I soon found that there was an utter absence of apprehension on the score of an attack.

"No, no," exclaimed the Admiral confidently. "Villeneuve has escaped from Toulon, it is true, but he will be like a canary that has slipped out of its cage, he will be so frightened at unexpectedly finding himself free that he will not dare to make the least use of his freedom; his greatest anxiety will be to escape the pursuers that he knows must be on his track. For, d'ye see, Nelson will become aware of his escape in less than twelve hours, and will be after him forthwith. The only wonder to me is that he has not overtaken him and brought him to action before now. I would give a good deal for the power to let Nelson know the whereabouts of this fleet; but I haven't another ship at my disposal. By the way, Mr Bowen, what are you going to do next?"

"I shall proceed to sea again without a moment's unnecessary delay, sir," I answered. "All I want is a crew."

"All you want!" echoed the Admiral. "By George, sir, I don't know where you will find a crew in Jamaica. I believe every available man has already been hunted out and appropriated by our men-o'-war. Have you no men at all?"

"Four only; and I am not yet by any means certain that they will consent to ship with me. I have no authority whatever over them. They formed part of the crew of the *Manilla*."

"Well," observed the Admiral, "I am afraid it is a bad look-out for you. At the same time if you should succeed in picking up enough to enable you to handle your schooner, let me know. I may find you some work to do, if you care to undertake it."

I slept ashore that night; and upon calling upon my agent next day was as much astonished as gratified to learn that "his friend" was prepared to furnish me with sixty prime seamen,—every one of whom had served on board a man-o'-war,—upon payment of a guinea a head for them. It was a tolerably stiff premium to pay; but, as times then were, they would be fully worth it, should they turn out to be as represented, so I agreed to go and see them that night; with the result that—not to dwell at unnecessary length upon this part of my story—I next morning found myself in command of as smart a crew as a man need wish to have at his back. I found that I was indebted for this slice of good fortune principally to the fact that the crew of a privateer were exempt from impressment, which exemption was allowed to hold good in the West Indies, although the exemption was frequently little better than a dead letter at home and in other parts of the world. I now went to work to provision and water the schooner for a three-months' cruise; and so well did my agent work for me that, within seventy-two hours of my arrival at Port Royal, I was able to report myself ready for sea and at the Admiral's service.

"That is well!" exclaimed the Admiral, rubbing his hands, when I so reported myself. "I congratulate you upon your smartness, Mr Bowen, and also upon your good fortune in finding a crew; it is a good deal more than our own people could have done. And now, if you are willing to render your country a further important service, I can afford you the opportunity. I am convinced that Lord Nelson will not remain inactive at home, now that Admiral Villeneuve has contrived to give him the slip, he will chase the combined fleet round the world, if need be. But it is important that Villeneuve should be watched. What, therefore, I want you to do is to sail in search of the combined fleet, and find them; ascertain as much as you can relative to their projected movements, and then find the British fleet and acquaint Nelson with all that you have been able to learn. When you have done that, you will be free to cruise wherever you please; but make an excuse to return to Jamaica at your earliest convenience, and do not fail to call on me."

I thanked the Admiral for his kindness, promised to execute his commission to the best of my ability, and took my leave. Two hours later the schooner, which I had rechristened the *Sword Fish*, was outside the Pallisades, working her way to the eastward under as heavy a press of canvas as I dared pile upon her.

Chapter Twenty.

I perform an important service.

The task with which I had been intrusted was one of the very greatest responsibility; for the descent of a combined French and Spanish fleet upon West Indian waters could only be assumed to point to an intention, on the part of our enemies, to wrest at least some of our West Indian possessions from us; an intention which our available resources on the spot would be utterly inadequate to frustrate, in view of the formidable force possessed by the enemy. It was therefore of the last importance that any British reinforcements which might be hastening to the support of the colonies should be quickly found and communicated with; and it was equally important that they should be furnished with the latest possible intelligence with regard to the movements of the enemy. The duty, therefore, that I was asked to perform, single-handed, was such as actually called for the employment of several vessels. Unfortunately, however, there were absolutely none available for the Admiral at this juncture, the only ship in port at the moment of my arrival in Jamaica being the schooner *Firefly*, which vessel had immediately been despatched to the several islands belonging to the British Crown with a warning that a formidable force was approaching; for the reception of which the best possible dispositions were to be made. It thus came about that I, a young, untried hand, found myself called upon to perform a service of almost national importance with only my own discretion to guide me. My instructions, however, were simple and explicit enough, and I resolved to carry them out to the letter.

After giving the subject the best consideration of which I was capable, I came to the conclusion that if Monsieur Villeneuve really intended to attack the islands in our possession, he would probably begin with the Windward Islands. Instead, therefore, of working my way out into the Atlantic, through the Windward Passage between Cuba and Saint Domingo, I stretched across

the Caribbean Sea on a taut larboard bowline, and noon on the fourth day after sailing from Port Royal found us some ninety miles west-north-west of the French island of Martinique, and while I was at dinner the mate stuck his head through the skylight to report land right ahead. I went up on deck to get a look at it, and soon identified it as the summit of Mont Pelée, the highest point in the island. We stood on, keeping a sharp look-out for vessels, but saw nothing; and about two bells in the first watch that night we found ourselves within the influence of the land breeze which was blowing off the island. Half an hour later saw us off the mouth of the bay of Fort Royal, and as the night was dark I came to the conclusion that it might be worth my while to stand inshore a little closer, upon the chance of being able to pick up some information. Accordingly, we worked in against the land breeze, and had arrived within half a mile of Pigeon Island, when we encountered a small trading felucca coming out. We allowed her to get to seaward of us, when we bore up in chase, and a few minutes later we were alongside the craft, and had secured quiet possession of her. The felucca carried five hands, whom I caused to be transferred to the schooner; and my first business was to get the master of the craft down into the cabin, where I informed him that all I wanted from him was some information, and that if he would answer my questions truly, I would at once release him and return his vessel to him; but if I found that he was attempting to deceive me, I would burn his felucca, and retain him and his crew as prisoners. The man was eager in his protestations that he would tell me everything that I wanted to know, and begged me not to destroy his vessel, as she represented his entire possessions, and was his sole means of earning a livelihood; a piece of information that led me to hope he would not attempt to deceive me; so I went to work to question him forthwith, jotting his answers down upon a piece of paper.

The information I obtained from the fellow was important enough to have justified me in running a far greater risk than I had actually incurred to procure it, and was to the effect that the combined fleets had been off the island that very day, with some forty prizes, comprising the Antigua convoy, in company; that it had captured Diamond Rock; and that, in consequence of certain information supposed to have been received from a schooner that had that day arrived from Europe, it had made all sail to the eastward. As to the character of the information, however, that had caused so powerful a force to take so unexpected a step, the man professed to know nothing. Having obtained this information from him, I sent the skipper on deck and had him conveyed forward, where he was placed in charge

of two men, while I had his crew down into the cabin, one by one, and questioned them. Their answers bore out what the skipper had already told me. I therefore concluded that the news was true, and accordingly released the felucca, with a strict caution that he was to proceed forthwith on his voyage to Mariegalante—the island to which he was bound—and on no account to attempt to re-enter the harbour of Fort Royal, under penalty of instant recapture. The fellow was evidently only too glad to get out of our hands upon such easy terms; and no sooner found himself once more safely on the deck of his little hooker than he made all sail to the northward, and was soon lost in the darkness. Dumaresq, who had remained with me thus far, thought this a good opportunity to rejoin his countrymen, and, with my cordial permission, took a passage in the felucca.

So far I had done very well; the combined fleet was only a few hours distant; and I had no doubt that, with so nimble-heeled a craft as the *Sword Fish*, I should have very little difficulty in overtaking them in the course of a day or two. The question now was whether I should proceed forthwith in pursuit of Monsieur Villeneuve, or whether I should devote an hour or two to an endeavour to ascertain the precise nature of the information said to have been brought from Europe by the schooner. This information might be of value, or it might not; but after giving the matter brief but careful consideration I came to the conclusion that it was hardly worth while troubling about; as, if the vessel had brought out despatches, they would have been delivered long since; and in any case, the captain and crew would know nothing of their contents. I therefore filled away forthwith, and by midnight had brought the island over our larboard quarter.

There was now another question that bothered me somewhat, and it was this: I could not understand why the combined fleet should be steering east, or why they should have gone off in such a hurry as had been represented to me. I racked my brains for a long time in search of a satisfactory solution of this problem, as I felt that until I had found such I should be quite in the dark as to the course which I ought to steer in order to overtake them. For although I had been informed that, when last seen, the fleet was steering to the southward and eastward, close-hauled, I had no data upon which to base an opinion as to the length of time during which they would continue to steer in that direction, for the simple reason that there was no apparent object in their steering in that direction at all. We had no possessions in that quarter to tempt them, unless it might be

Barbados; and even that island lay considerably to leeward of the course that Monsieur Villeneuve was said to be steering. At length, however, a possible explanation suggested itself. It occurred to me that the schooner, which was supposed to have brought the information leading to the precipitate departure of Monsieur Villeneuve, might have fallen in with and succeeded in eluding the British pursuing fleet, of the existence of which the admiral at Jamaica had felt so certain; and if she had, and had brought news to Martinique of the approach of such a fleet, I could understand Monsieur Villeneuve's anxiety to be off; for we were all fully persuaded that there was nothing the French admiral desired so little as to encounter Nelson. And, upon considering the matter further, the conviction forced itself irresistibly upon me that, if Monsieur Villeneuve had been given good reason to believe that he was pursued, his chief anxiety would be to get back to Europe as quickly as possible. Such a desire would fully account for everything in his movements that I had found difficult to understand, and it would also account for the course that he was said to be steering; that course being the only one that would at once lead him homeward and at the same time enable him to avoid a meeting with the suppositious British fleet. So thoroughly at length did I convince myself that this represented the actual state of the case that I unhesitatingly set the *Sword Fish's* head in the same direction that I believed the combined fleet to be steering; and then, having issued orders that the schooner was to be driven at the highest speed consistent with safety to her spars, I went below and turned in.

During the remainder of that night and the whole of the next day we carried on, without sighting anything in the shape of a sail; but at dawn of the second day my persistence was rewarded by the sight of a large fleet of ships strung out along the horizon, and by mid-day we had approached them near enough to enable us to identify them as the fleet of which we were in search. There was a big fleet of merchantmen in company, which I assumed to be the captured Antigua convoy; and by and by one of these—a fine full-rigged ship—wore round, in response to a signal, and headed for us. I allowed her to approach within a couple of miles of us, when we in turn shifted our helm and going round upon the starboard tack, assumed all the appearance of being in precipitate flight. But I was particular to flatten in all sheets and braces to such an extent that, by careful and persistent wind-jamming, the schooner became as sluggish as a log; and in this way we played with the ship until we had decoyed her a good twenty miles away from the rest of the fleet, sometimes allowing her to gain upon us a

trifle, and then drawing away from her again, my object, of course, being to capture her if I could. And of my ability to do this—provided that I could decoy her far enough away from all possible support—I had very little doubt; for I did not consider it in the least likely that she would have more than sixty Frenchmen on board her as a prize crew, while I had an equal number of Englishmen.

At length, about an hour before sunset, we allowed the ship to approach us within gun-shot, and shortly afterwards she opened fire upon us with a six-pounder. The shot flew wide; but all the same I caused our helm to be put down, and as the schooner slowly luffed into the wind I gave orders for all our sheets to be let fly, presenting an appearance of terrible confusion. The ruse was successful; the ship ceased firing, and came booming along toward us under every inch of canvas that she could spread. Meanwhile our lads, hugely delighted at the fun in prospect, armed themselves, got the grappling-irons ready, and prepared for boarding the stranger. The weather was quite fine enough to admit of our running alongside in the schooner, there being very little swell on; so as soon as we were ready the men stationed themselves at the sheets and braces, and by a little judicious manipulation of these and the helm we contrived to get sternway upon the schooner just as the ship came booming down upon our weather quarter. Nobody on board her seemed to think of shortening sail until she was fairly abreast of us, and then a terrific hullabaloo broke out as her crew endeavoured to clew up and haul down everything at once—they even let run their topsail-halliards in their excitement. Then, in the midst of it all, just as the ship went surging past us, with a great rustling of canvas and lashing of loose cordage in the wind, a man sprang into her mizzen-rigging and hailed us in French, ordering us to follow until he could heave-to, when he would send a boat on board us. This suited my plans to a nicety; so we filled upon the schooner and followed the ship closely, luffing up for her lee quarter as we did so; and so well had everything worked with us that I believe none of the Frenchmen had the slightest suspicion that anything was wrong until we had actually run them aboard and thrown our grappling-irons. Then the excitement was even more distracting than before, everybody crying out at once; officers and men vying with each other in giving the most contradictory orders, and nobody dreaming of obeying any single one of them. The surprise was complete; and when our lads followed me over the ship's bulwarks, with drawn cutlasses, we found as our opponents only a shouting, shrieking, gesticulating mob, who reviled us for our perfidious mode of fighting in one breath, and in the next passionately

conjured us not to overlook the fact that they surrendered. It was as amusing a bit of business as I had been engaged in for many a day.

We lost no time in securing our prisoners—who were only some forty in number—and then I turned my attention to the ship, which I ascertained to be the *Caribbean*, of London, of twelve hundred and forty-three tons register, laden with sugar and rum. She was therefore a valuable recapture. She carried thirty-two passengers, and by great good luck her own British crew was also on board. It was not necessary, therefore, for me to weaken my own force by putting a prize crew on board her; my chief mate being quite sufficient to represent and watch over the interests of the *Sword Fish* and her owners. The individual who had been put on board her as prize-master, when she was captured by Monsieur Villeneuve's fleet, happened to be a very talkative fellow, and accordingly I had not much difficulty in extracting from him the information that it had been rumoured through the fleet that the suddenness of Monsieur Villeneuve's departure from the West Indies was due to intelligence that Lord Nelson was in pursuit. This statement, if true, exactly bore out my theory; and a little more judicious questioning enabled me to ascertain that it had further been stated that, at the time of departure from Martinique, the British fleet was believed to be not more than four days' sail distant. I thus obtained something in the shape of a clue as to the direction in which my further search ought to be prosecuted; and accordingly hauled up to the southward, close-hauled on the starboard tack, with our recapture in company.

It was more than a week, however, before we contrived to obtain any definite information as to the whereabouts of the British fleet, and even then I was four days longer in finding it; but when at length this was achieved, I had the satisfaction of learning that my information was the very latest of an authentic character that had been furnished to Nelson; and it had the effect of causing him instantly to determine to retrace his steps to Europe. This was good news to me, for it enabled me to send my recapture across the Atlantic with the British fleet as a protector, instead of taking her into Kingston, in Jamaica, where the necessary formalities connected with the capture would have involved us in a vast amount of trouble and expense. I accordingly wrote a brief letter or two home, which I forwarded by the *Caribbean*, and parted company with her and the fleet within an hour of having fallen in with the latter. And thus terminated, successfully and profitably, the service which I had

undertaken at the instigation of the Admiral stationed at Jamaica.

I was now my own master once more, free to go wherever my whim prompted me, and I determined that I would put into effect a plan that had long commended itself to me; namely, to cruise along the Spanish Main in the hope of picking up one of the galleons or plate-ships that were still despatched from time to time from Cartagena. Upon parting company, therefore, with the British fleet, I cruised along the whole line of the Windward Islands as far south as Tobago and Trinidad, and then bore up for the Main. In leisurely fashion and under easy canvas we coasted along the shore, taking a look into the Cariaco Gulf without finding anything worth picking up, and thence across to Cape Codera, off which the wind came out from the westward, compelling us to make a stretch off the land. This occurred about midnight. I secured an observation for my longitude at nine o'clock the next morning, and another for my latitude at noon, about which time I became aware that the barometer was falling, although not rapidly enough to give cause for any uneasiness. As the afternoon wore on, however, there were indications that a change of weather was impending. The sky lost the pure brilliancy of its blue, and by insensible degrees assumed an ashen pallor, which the sun vainly struggled to pierce until he merged from a palpitating, rayless ball of light to a shapeless blotch of dim, watery radiance, and then disappeared. At the same time the wind died away until we were left becalmed and rolling rail-under upon a swell that gathered strength every hour as it came creeping up from the westward. In a short time it became a fine example of what the Spaniards call a "furious calm", the schooner rolling so heavily that I deemed it prudent to send the yards and topmasts down on deck to relieve the lower-masts. And I did this the more readily because the steady, continuous decline of the mercury in the tube assured me that we were booked for a stiff blow. Yet hour succeeded hour until the darkness closed down upon us, and still, beyond the portents already mentioned, there was no sign of the coming breeze. The night fell as dark as a wolf's mouth; the air was so close and hot that the mere act of breathing was performed with difficulty; and the quick, jerky roll of the schooner at length became positively distressing in its persistent monotony. Of course, under the circumstances, turning in was not to be thought of, so far as I was concerned. I therefore made myself as comfortable as I could upon the wheel-grating, and awaited developments.

The fact is that I was puzzled. I did not know what to make of the weather. Had it not been for the steady, continuous fall of the mercury I should have expected nothing worse than a fresh breeze from the westward, preceded perhaps by a thunder-squall; but the barometer indicated something more serious than that, yet the sky gave no verifying sign of the approach of anything like a heavy blow. But I had long ago taken in everything except the boom-foresail, to save the sails from beating themselves to pieces, so I was pretty well prepared for any eventuality.

It was close upon midnight when the change came, and then it was nothing at all alarming, being merely a sudden but by no means violent squall out from about due west, followed by a heavy downpour of rain. The rain lasted about a quarter of an hour, and when it ceased we were again becalmed. Suddenly I became conscious of a faint luminousness somewhere in the atmosphere, and looking about me to discover the cause, I observed what looked like a ball of lambent, greenish flame clinging to the foremast-head, where it swayed about, elongating and contracting with the roll of the ship, exactly as a gigantic soap-bubble might have done. It clung there, swaying, for some moments, and then glided slowly down the mast until it reached the jib-stay, down which it slid to the bowsprit, whence, after wavering for a few seconds, it travelled along the bowsprit, inboard, and vanished, not, however, until it had revealed by its corpse-like light the horror-stricken features of some half a dozen of the watch huddled together on the forecastle, in attitudes every curve and bend of which were eloquent of consternation.

"That's a bad sign, sir; so they say," remarked Saunders, my chief mate, whose watch it was.

"What? The appearance of that light?" demanded I.

"Not so much the appearance of it, sir, but the way that it travelled. They say that if a corposant appears aboard a vessel and stays aloft, or travels upwards, it's all right; but if it comes down from aloft, it means a heavy gale of wind at the very least," answered Saunders.

"Pooh!" said I; "mere superstition. Everybody knows nowadays that a corposant is nothing whatever but an electrical phenomenon, and therefore merely an indication that the atmosphere is surcharged with electricity. As to whether it travels up or down, that, in my opinion, is mere chance or accident, call it which you will."

"Have you ever seen any of those things before, sir?" inquired the mate.

"No," said I; "this is the first time that I have ever been shipmates with one."

"Ah!" remarked the mate, with a distinct accent of superior experience in his tone; "I've seen 'em often enough; too often, I may say. Why, there was one time when I was aboard the little *Fox*, bound from Jamaica to New Providence. We were lying becalmed, just as we are to-night, close to the Diamond Bank, and with pretty much the same sort of weather, too, when one of them things boarded us, making its appearance on the spindle of the vane at our main-topmast head. It wavered about for a minute or two, exactly like that thing just now, and then rolled, as it might be, down the spar until it met the topmast-stay, down which it travelled to the foremast-head, and from thence it came down the topsail sheet to the deck, where it bursted. Ten minutes after that happened, sir, we were struck by a squall that hove us over on our beam-ends. We had to cut both masts away before she would right with us, and when at length she rose to an even keel, there was five feet of water in the hold. Of course we could do nothing but scud before it, and, the squall hardening into a furious gale of wind, we went ashore about two hours afterwards on South Point, Yuma Island, and out of a crew of thirty-four men only seven of us was saved! Now, what d'ye think of that, sir?"

"Why, I think it was a terribly unfortunate affair; but I don't believe that the corposant had anything to do with it," answered I.

"Well, sir," answered the mate, "I only hope that it hadn't; because, d'ye see, if your view is the correct one, we needn't fear anything happening in consequence of—Why, bust me, but there's another of 'em!"

It was true. While Saunders was in the very act of speaking, another of the strange, weird lights had suddenly become visible, this time on the mainmast-head, where it hung for a few minutes, finally sliding down the mast to the deck, where it rolled to and fro for perhaps half a minute, presenting the appearance of a sphere of luminous mist, the most brilliant part of which was its centre. I am by no means a superstitious person, but I am free to admit that the sight of this weird, uncanny thing gliding about the deck and emitting its ghostly light, almost at my feet, produced a sufficiently creepy feeling to make me unfeignedly glad when it presently disappeared.

"Now, you mark my words, sir, if we don't have some very ugly weather after this," observed Saunders, producing his tinder-box and lighting his pipe.

I walked to the skylight and took a squint at the barometer. It was still falling, and by this time the depression had assumed such proportions as to fully justify such an expectation as that entertained by the mate. I thought, therefore, that it might be only prudent to make some further preparation, and I accordingly gave orders to reef the foresail and fore-staysail. All this time it continued as dark as pitch, and so breathlessly calm that the helmsman, wishing to prick up the wicks of the binnacle-lamps, was able to do so in the open air, the only wind affecting the naked flame being the draught occasioned by the heavy roll of the schooner.

But this was not destined to last very long. Some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour after the second corposant had vanished we felt a faint movement in the atmosphere which caused our small spread of canvas to flap heavily once or twice; then came a puff of hot, damp air that lasted long enough to give the schooner steerage-way; and when this was on the point of dying, a scuffle of wind swept over us that careened the schooner to her bearings, and before she had recovered herself the true breeze was upon us, with a deep, weird, moaning sound that was inexpressibly dismal, and that somehow seemed to impart a feeling of dire foreboding to the listener. Not that there was anything in the least terrifying in the strength of the wind—far from it, indeed,—for it was no heavier than a double-reefed topsail breeze, to which the schooner stood up as stiff as a church, but there was a certain indescribable hollowness in the sound of it—that is the only fitting term I can find to apply—that was quite unlike anything that I had heard before, and that somehow seemed, in its weirdness, to indisputably forebode disaster.

The schooner was now forging through the water at a speed of some four knots, and looking well up into the wind, which had come out from the westward. As I have said, there was already a very heavy swell running, and upon the top of this a very steep, awkward sea soon began to make, so that within half an hour of the breeze striking us we were pitching bows under, and the decks to leeward were all afloat. By this time, too, it had become perfectly apparent that the wind was rapidly gaining strength; so rapidly, indeed, that about an hour after the first puff it came down upon us with all the fury of a squall, laying the schooner down to her rail, and causing her to plunge with

fearful violence into the fast-rising sea. Within the next half-hour the wind had increased so greatly in strength that I began to think there really might be something in Saunders's theory after all, and I was inwardly debating whether I should haul the fore-sheet to windward and heave the schooner to, or whether it would be better to up helm and run before it until the weather should moderate a bit, when a third corposant suddenly appeared, this time on the boom-foresail gaff-end.

"Now, sir," remarked Saunders, "we shall soon know whether we've got the worst of the blow yet or not. If we have, that thing'll shift higher up; but if we haven't, it'll come down like the others."

I did not answer him, for I was at the moment straining my eyes into the blackness on the weather-bow, where I fancied I had caught, a second or two before, a deeper shadow. There were moments when I thought I saw it again, but so profound was the darkness that it really seemed absurd to suppose it possible to discern anything in it; to make sure, however, I sang out to the look-out men on the forecastle to keep their eyes wide open, and their answer came so sharp and prompt as to convince me that they were fully on the alert, and that I had allowed my imagination to deceive me. I therefore turned to Saunders with some remark upon my lips in reply to his, when I saw the corposant suddenly leave the gaff-end and go driving away to leeward on the wings of the gale. I naturally expected that it would almost immediately vanish, but it did not; on the contrary, it had all the appearance of having been arrested in its flight, for I saw it elongating and collapsing again, as it had done with the motion of the schooner, and it also appeared to me to be describing long arcs across the sky. For a moment I was puzzled to account for so strange a phenomenon, and then the explanation came to me in a flash. I had not been deceived when I believed I caught sight of a shadowy something sweeping athwart our bows. I had seen a ship, and there she was to leeward of us, with the corposant clinging to one of her spars. I had just time to give the order to bear up in pursuit, and to get the schooner before the wind, when the corposant seemed to settle down nearer to the water, and in another instant it had vanished.

Chapter Twenty One.

A terrible adventure.

With the disappearance of the corposant there was nothing whatever to betray the presence of a strange sail in our vicinity; for now, strain my eyes as I would, I could not be at all certain that I saw anything, although there were times when the same vague, shapeless blot of deeper darkness that had previously attracted my attention seemed to loom up momentarily out of the Stygian murkiness ahead. There were times also when, the water being highly phosphorescent, it appeared to me that, among the ghostly gleamings of the breaking surges, I could faintly discern a more symmetrical space of luminosity, corresponding to the foaming track of a ship moving at a high rate of speed through the water. But, to make sure of the matter, I ordered the reef to be shaken out of the foresail, and also set the mainsail, close-reefed, with the boom topped well up. This increased the speed of the schooner quite as much as I thought desirable, more, indeed, than was at all prudent; for, let me tell you, it is risky work to be flying along before a gale of wind at a speed of fully nine knots an hour on a pitch-black night, with a suspicion, amounting almost to absolute certainty, that there is another vessel directly ahead, and close aboard of you for aught that you can tell to the contrary. And, indeed, we soon had evidence of this; for, feeling uneasy upon the matter, I had started to go forward with the intention of warning the look-out men that I had reason to believe there was a ship close ahead of us, and that they must therefore keep an extra bright look-out, when, as I arrived abreast the fore-rigging, my eyes still straining into the darkness ahead, the schooner was hove up on the breast of a heavy, following sea, and as she topped it with the ghostly sea-fire of its fiercely-hissing crest brimming almost to the rail, a black shape seemed to suddenly solidify out of the gloom ahead, apparently within biscuit-toss of our jib-boom end, with an unmistakable wake of boiling foam on each side of it, and the two look-out men yelled, as with one voice, and in the high-pitched accents of sudden alarm.

"Hard-a-port! hard a-port! There's a ship right under our bows, sir!"

The helm was promptly put over, the schooner sheered out of the wake of the black mass ahead—apparently a craft of considerable size,—and we ranged up on her starboard quarter. It will convey some idea of the closeness of the shave we made of it when I say that, even above the howling of the gale, the fierce hiss of the rapidly rising sea, and the roar of our bow-wave, we caught the sound of an unintelligible hail from the stranger, which almost immediately displayed a lantern over her taffrail for a few seconds, as a warning to us, her people being

doubtless under the impression that our encounter had been accidental, and that we had only that moment seen her for the first time.

Having now established beyond all question the fact of the stranger's proximity to us, I ordered our mainsail to be hauled down, balance-reefed, and reset, by which means we presently found that the stranger was gradually drawing ahead of us again; and the danger of collision being thus averted, I began to ask myself whether it was advisable to continue the chase any longer. The fact is, I had followed this craft instinctively, for I knew that there were so few vessels flying British colours in that precise part of the world that the presumption was strongly in favour of this one being either a Spaniard or a Dutchman, and in either case an enemy. But assuming her to be one or the other, she was just as likely to be a man-o'-war as a merchantman—she had appeared to be quite large enough to be the former, in that brief, indistinct glance that we had caught of her,—and if she happened to be a man-o'-war we should probably find ourselves in the wrong box when daylight broke. On the other hand she had not appeared to be so large as to preclude the possibility of her being a merchantman—a Spanish or Dutch West Indiaman; and should she prove to be either of these, she would be well worth fighting for. I considered the question carefully, and at length came to the conclusion that the risk of following her was quite worth taking, and we accordingly held all on as we were.

Meanwhile the gale was steadily growing fiercer, and the sea rising higher and becoming more dangerous with every mile that we traversed in our blind, headlong flight before it; and it appeared to me that the option whether I should continue the pursuit of the stranger would soon be taken from me by the imperative necessity to heave-to if I would avoid the almost momentarily increasing danger of the schooner being pooped, when a piercing cry of "Breakers ahead?" burst from the two men on the look-out forward, instantly followed by the still more startling cry of "Breakers on the port bow!"

"Breakers on the starboard bow!"

I sprang to the rail and looked ahead. Merciful Heaven! it was true, right athwart our path, as far as the eye could penetrate the gloom on either bow, there stretched a barrier of wildly-leaping breakers and spouting foam, gleaming spectrally against the midnight blackness of the murky heavens; and even as I gazed, spell-bound, at the dreadful spectacle I saw the black bulk of the strange ship outlined against the ghostly whiteness,

and in another instant she had swung broadside-on; and as a perfect mountain of white foam leaped upon her, enfolding her in its snowy embrace, her masts fell, and methought that, mingled with the sudden, deafening roar of the trampling breakers, I caught the sound of a despairing wail borne toward us against the wind.

Oh! the horror of that moment! I shall never forget it. There was nothing to be done, no means of escape; for the walls of white water had seemed to leap at us out of the darkness so suddenly that they were no sooner seen than we were upon them; and the only choice left us was whether we would plunge into them stem-on, or be hove in among them broadside-on, as had been the case of the strange ship. With the lightning-like celerity of decision that seems to be instinct in moments of sudden, awful peril, I determined to drive the schooner ashore stem-on; hoping that, aided by our light draught of water, we might be hove up high enough on the beach, or whatever it was, to permit of the escape of at least a few of us with our lives; and I shouted to the helmsman to steady his helm, the breakers right ahead of us seeming to be less high and furious than those on either bow. There was no time for more; no time to order all hands on deck; no time even to utter a warning cry to those already on deck to grasp the nearest thing to hand and cling for their lives, for my cry to the helmsman was still on my lips when the schooner seemed to leap down upon the barrier of madly-plunging breakers, and in an instant we were hemmed about with a crashing fury of white water that boiled and leaped about us, smiting the schooner in all parts of her hull at once, foaming in over the rail here, there, and everywhere like a pack of hungry wolves, spouting high in air and flying over us in blinding deluges of spray until the poor little craft seemed to be buried; while I, without knowing how I got there, found myself on the wheel-grating, assisting the helmsman, with the yeasty water swirling about our knees as it boiled in over the taffrail. I caught a momentary glimpse of the strange ship as we swept athwart her stern at a distance of less than a hundred fathoms. Her black bulk was sharply outlined against the luminous loam as a whelming breaker passed inshore of her, and left her, for a second, up-hove on the breast of the next one; and I could see that she was on her beam-ends—a large ship of probably twelve hundred tons. I could see no sign of people on board her, but that was not surprising; they had probably been all swept overboard by the first mountain—wall of water that swept over her after she had broached-to.

And such was to be our fate also. My only wonder was that it had not come already; but come it must, and I braced myself for the shock, already feeling in imagination the terrific grinding concussion, the sickening jar, the awful upheaval of the schooner's quivering frame, and the wrenching of her timbers asunder. But second after second sped, and the shock did not come; and half-buried in the boiling swirl of maddened waters, the schooner swept ahead, now up-hove on the breast of a fiery breaker that swept her from stem to stern as it flung her forward like a cork, now struggling and staggering in a hollow of seething, yeasty foam. At length, as the schooner settled down into one of these swirling hollows, she actually did strike, but the blow was a light one, only just sufficient to swear by and not enough to check her headlong rush for the smallest fraction of a second; and shortly afterwards I became aware that the breakers were perceptibly less weighty, so much so that in about another minute they ceased to break inboard.

It now dawned upon me that we must be passing over a submerged reef of considerable extent, and my hopes began to revive; for since we had traversed it thus far in safety, there was just the ghost of a chance that we might manage to blunder across the remainder of it without serious damage. As my thoughts took this direction my eyes fell upon a figure clinging to the main rigging, and I made it out to be Saunders, my chief mate. I shouted to him, and by good luck my voice reached him, and he came staggering aft to me. Without relaxing my grip on the wheel, I hurriedly explained to him my impression with regard to our situation, and directed him to go forward and see both anchors clear for letting go; for I had determined that, should my supposition prove correct, and should we be so extremely fortunate as to traverse the remaining portion of the reef in safety, I would anchor immediately that we should emerge into clear water. Fortunately for us all in our present strait, our cables were always kept bent, so that there was not very much to be done; and in a few minutes Saunders returned aft with the intelligence that all was ready for anchoring at any moment.

And now I really began to hope in earnest that we might perchance escape, for the sea was not breaking nearly so heavily around us; indeed I could distinguish, at no great distance ahead, small patches of unbroken water, with wider patches beyond; and, best of all, we had only touched the reef once, and that but lightly. Presently the schooner shot into a patch of unbroken water that appeared to communicate at one point with a larger patch, and I at once steered for the point of

junction, at the same time singing out to the mate to get in the mainsail, and for the hands to stand by the fore and staysail halliards. A line of breakers still extended for some distance ahead of us, but they were now detached, with clear water between them, and if we could only contrive to keep the schooner in the unbroken water all might yet be well. We were still rushing along at a great pace, for the gale was blowing, if possible, more fiercely than ever; but the water was smooth, and I was consequently hopeful that, by letting go both anchors and giving the schooner the full scope of her cables, we might manage to ride it out without dragging. At length we brought the last of the visible breakers fair on our quarter, and I was in the act of putting the helm over, singing out at the same time to haul down the staysail and foresail, when the mate, who was on the forecastle ready to attend to the letting go of the anchors, shouted that he thought he could make out something like a large rock or small islet a short distance ahead. Hurriedly instructing the helmsman to keep the schooner as she was going, I ran forward, and immediately made out the object, which looked amply large enough to give us a lee to anchor under. We were pretty close to it; so without further ado the schooner was stripped of her remaining canvas and coned into a berth close under the lee of the huge mass, when both anchors were let go, the port anchor first and the starboard anchor half a minute later; and in less than five minutes we had the supreme satisfaction of finding the *Sword Fish* riding snugly, and in smooth water, with some three fathoms between her keel and the sandy bottom.

I was by this time pretty well fagged out, for the hour was drawing well on toward daybreak. Nevertheless my curiosity was so powerfully excited with regard to the spot which we had stumbled upon that, after thoroughly satisfying myself that the schooner was safe, and before turning in, I got out my chart and spread it open upon the cabin table. Our position at noon on the previous day was of course laid down upon it, and it needed but a few moments' consideration of the courses and distances that we had subsequently steered to demonstrate that we had blundered right into the heart of Los Roques, or the Roccas, the most dangerous group of islets, without exception, in the whole of the Caribbean Sea. They are situated some seventy-five miles due north of La Guayra, and extend over an area of ocean measuring about twenty-five miles from east to west, and about half that distance from north to south. The group consists of two islands proper, Cayo Grande and Cayo de Sal, the first being triangular in shape, and measuring some six and a half miles each way along the perpendicular and base of

the triangle, while Cayo de Sal is about seven and a half miles long by perhaps half a mile broad.

There are about thirty other islets in the group, all of them very much smaller than the two above named, and some of them so small as to deserve rather the name of *rocks* than islets. But the peculiarity about the group which renders it so exceedingly dangerous to strangers is that it forms part of an extensive reef, roughly of quadrangular form, the belt of reef being about three miles wide, with a fine open space inside divided into two fairly good anchorages by a reef stretching across it in a north-westerly direction, from the westerly extremity of Cayo Grande to the main reef. There are several passages leading through the main reef into these anchorages, notably one on the northern side of the reef, but the difficulties of the navigation are so great to strangers that, if report is to be believed, it was, up to a comparatively recent date, a favourite resort of pirates, who, once through the reef, were practically safe from pursuit. Such was the spot into which the *Sword Fish* had rushed, blindfold as it were. And I can only account for our escape from destruction by supposing that we had providentially hit off one of the channels through the reef, or else that the gale had heaped the water upon the reef to such an extent that, with our light draught, we were able to pass over it. However, I had only to look at the group, as portrayed upon the chart, to feel thoroughly assured as to the safety of the schooner and ourselves; so I turned into my bunk with an easy mind and a grateful heart at our truly miraculous escape, and fell asleep the moment that my head touched the pillow.

When the steward came to call me at seven bells the gale was still raging furiously; but about four bells in the forenoon watch a break in the sky appeared to windward, and shortly afterwards there was a noticeable decrease in the strength of the wind. Meanwhile the break in the clouds widened, patches of blue sky appeared here and there, extending rapidly, and when noon arrived I was able to get a meridian altitude of the sun, which conclusively demonstrated the truth of my surmise that we were anchored in the Rocca group. The rock that sheltered us was some forty feet high, and about twenty acres in extent, situate nearly in the middle of the northern anchorage; and astern of us, at a distance of four miles, lay Cayo Grande, with Cayo de Sal about the same distance on our larboard beam. Now that it was daylight it was a perfectly simple and easy matter to identify our surroundings with the aid of the chart.

By the time that dinner was over the gale had so far moderated that, in our sheltered position, it had become perfectly safe to lower a boat. I therefore ordered away the gig, and, taking the ship's telescope with me, landed upon the rock which had afforded us so welcome and timely a shelter, and climbed to its summit to see whether any portion of the wreck of the unfortunate stranger that had been in company with us during the preceding night still hung together. To my surprise I found that quite a considerable portion of her was visible; indeed at times it appeared to me that I could see almost if not quite the whole of her hull; but as she was some eight miles distant I could not be at all certain of this. The sea appeared to be still breaking heavily over her at times, but she seemed to have beaten almost entirely across the reef, there being but little broken water between us and her; and to this circumstance I attributed the fact that she was still in existence. I spent quite half an hour upon the summit of the rock, gazing upon the strange, wild scene by which I was surrounded; and when at length I rejoined the boat the wind had moderated to such an extent that, although it was still rather too strong for an eight-mile pull to windward, there was no reason why we should not sail as far out as the wreck, to see whether any of her crew still survived. I therefore returned to the schooner, and, procuring the boat's mast and sails, started upon our expedition. But we were rather late in getting away; so that it took us until within half an hour of sunset to work up to the wreck, and even then we could not approach her nearer than within a cable's length because of the broken water; but we got near enough to enable us to make out that she was an armed ship—she had all the look of a small frigate—and I took her to be Spanish. But although her hull was not nearly so much battered about as I had expected it would be, there was no sign of life aboard her, at which I was not surprised when I looked at the broad belt of still angry surf through which she had beaten. But I saw enough to determine me to pay the wreck a visit before leaving the group, and accordingly, when I got back to the schooner, which Saunders had made all ataunto once more during my absence, I made arrangements to weigh and beat up to the wreck immediately after breakfast next morning.

By daylight the wind had dwindled away to a gentle breeze, while the sea had gone down to such an extent that I anticipated no difficulty whatever in boarding the wreck. Nor was I disappointed, for when we reached the craft, shortly after six bells in the forenoon, the sea was no longer breaking over her, or even round her, the breakers now being confined to the outer fringe of the reef. But imagine, if you can, my

astonishment at seeing a man—a wretched, ragged, scarecrow of a fellow he looked to be—on the poop, who, as we drew near, began to wave and signal to us with frantic energy. He appeared to be desperately afraid that we had not seen him, or that, having seen him, we should still not trouble to take him off, for he was waving a large, dark cloth when we first made him out, and he continued to do so until the boat was almost alongside. We bumped against the wreck in the wake of her mizzen chains—her main and fore chains were under water—and, the instant that the bowman hooked on, this man, who seemed to be the only survivor of the wreck, came slipping and sliding down the steeply inclined deck until he stood just above us, when he stood for a few seconds staring down upon us in silence. Then he cried, in a piercing voice: “Say, for the love of God, are you English?”

“Ay, ay, my hearty; you have guessed right the first time,” I answered. “But, pray, who in the name of fortune are you? And what ship is this?”

For answer the fellow plumped down upon his knees, clasped his hands before him, lifted up his eyes to heaven, and by the movement of his lips I supposed him to be engaged either in prayer or thanksgiving. One or two of the men in the boat with me laughed, and a third must needs display his wit by calling out a profane jest; but I silenced them sharply, for there was an intense abandonment in this strange man’s manner and behaviour that showed him to be under the influence of extraordinary emotion. Presently he rose to his feet, and, scrambling down into the boat with the most astonishing activity, grasped my hand and pressed it to his lips fervently. Then he looked me in the face and said:

“Oh, sir, I thank God most humbly and heartily for this His great mercy to me, a poor, miserable sinner. But you’ll take me away with you, sir; you’ll not leave me aboard here to fall into the hands of my enemies again? Sir, sir, you are an Englishman, you say, and your tongue is English. You have a kind, good face. Sir, take me with you, and make me your slave if you will, but let me not fall into the hands of those incarnate fiends the Spaniards again.”

“Have no fear, my good fellow,” answered I. “Of course we will take you with us, not as a slave, but as a shipmate if you will. But you have not yet answered the question I asked you. Who are you? And what ship is this?”

"Who am I?" he repeated, staring wildly at me. "Why, I used to be called Isaac Hoard to home in Exmouth, and among my shipmates, but for the last five years, ever since I've been in the hands of the accursed Spaniards, I've known no other name than 'heretico'."

"And the ship," I reiterated; "is she Spanish?"

"Yes, sir; she is Spanish," answered the poor fellow, who looked half-mad as well as haggard, and thin almost like a skeleton. "She was a fine frigate forty-eight hours ago, named the *Magdalena*; now the vengeance of God has fallen upon her and her crew, and she lies a wreck, while every one of them has perished and gone to his own place."

"And how happens it that you survive while all the rest of the crew have perished?" I demanded.

"By the mercy of God and the inhumanity of the Spaniards," he answered. "They made me a slave of the crew, at whose every beck and call I was from the beginning of the morning watch until four bells in the first watch; and when my day's work was over they used to lock me into a cell under the forecastle. So that when the ship struck I was unable to rush on deck with the rest of them, and so my life was saved."

"Well," said I, "it appears that you have a story to tell that may be well worth listening to at some future time. Now, tell me, do you know where this frigate was last from, and whither she was bound?"

"Yes," answered Hoard, "I can tell you that, sir. She sailed from Cartagena five days ago, and was bound to Cadiz with despatches; at least such was the talk among the crew."

"With despatches!" I ejaculated. "Good! Now, do you happen to know where those despatches are to be found?"

"No, sir; that I don't," answered Hoard. "I've never been abaft the mainmast until to-day, if you'll believe me; and I don't even know the cap'n's name. But I expect his despatches will be in his cabin, along with any other papers of value that he may have had in his possession."

"Quite so; most likely they are," I remarked. "I'll go on board and give the craft an overhaul. Jump on deck, a couple of you, to lend me a hand in case I should need you; and catch a turn with the painter somewhere."

So saying, I climbed up on the ship's poop, and with considerable difficulty—owing to the exceedingly steep slope of the deck—made my way to the companion, which I descended. At the foot of the ladder, I found myself confronted by a bulkhead which, as I soon found, partitioned off the captain's quarters from the other part of the ship. Opening a door that faced me, I entered a fine, handsome cabin, magnificently fitted up, and very little damaged, except that the two guns which had evidently been in it seemed to have broken adrift and gone through the vessel's side, the gun on the weather side having smashed a handsome mahogany table to smithereens in its passage athwart the cabin. There were stains of wet on the sofas on the lee side and on the carpeted deck, showing that the water had entered through the breach in the ship's side: but that, with the smashed table and the hole in the side, constituted all the visible damage in the cabin. There was another bulkhead in front of me, with an open door in it, through which I caught a glimpse of stern windows, together with certain indications that the cabin into which I was looking was in all probability the captain's state-room. Here, if anywhere, I thought I should be most likely to find the despatches which constituted the chief object of my search; and I accordingly made my way into the after-cabin. A handsome and roomy cot, slung on the starboard side, confirmed my impression that this must be the captain's private sanctum; and I at once looked round for a likely receptacle for papers of importance and other articles of value. I had not far to look. Close to the door, against the bulkhead, stood a massive and handsome cabinet writing-table, so placed that the light from the stern windows would fall over a sitter's shoulders on to the table. Right up against the starboard side of the ship stood a large chest of drawers, with the top arranged as a dressing-table: and against the port side was a book-case with glazed doors, three or four of the panes of glass being smashed so completely that several of the volumes had tumbled out on to the floor. I took up one or two of the books and opened them, but could make nothing of their contents, they being in Spanish, which was all but a sealed language to me. The book-case was full of books from top to bottom, so it was clear that it was useless to look there for the documents I desired to find; I therefore turned to the next nearest object, which was the writing-table. This was fitted with a sloping top that evidently lifted, and a nest of capacious drawers occupied the back of the affair, above the writing-desk, while a large cupboard on each side formed the base, with room for a man's legs between the two. I tried the top, the cupboards, and the drawers, but all were locked; and the article was so solidly constructed that I at

once saw it would be useless to think of breaking it open without proper tools. I therefore sang out to the two men on deck to take the boat and return to the schooner for the carpenter, bidding him bring with him everything necessary to pick a number of locks, or otherwise open some drawers and cupboards. And while the boat was gone I turned my attention to the dressing-table.

Chapter Twenty Two.

Hoard communicates to me some very important information.

This, too, was a very substantial and handsomely made piece of furniture, the material being Spanish mahogany. But, unlike the writing-table, all its drawers were unlocked; and, opening them one after the other, I found them to be full of apparel: shirts of finest linen, silk stockings, a brand-new suit of uniform, coats, breeches—in short everything necessary to complete the toilet of a man in the very pink of fashion. And, hanging by its belt from one of several brass hooks screwed to the bulkhead, I saw a very handsome sword with a gold hilt. This I took down and examined, drawing the weapon from its sheath to do so. The blade proved to be of Toledo make, a magnificent piece of steel, so elastic that by exerting a considerable amount of strength I succeeded in bringing the point and hilt together, and when I released it, the blade at once straightened itself out again as perfectly as before my experiment. The steel was elaborately damascened with a most beautiful and intricate pattern in gold, and altogether the weapon so irresistibly took my fancy that I unhesitatingly appropriated it forthwith. The shirts and stockings, too, and a few other articles of clothing that looked as if they would fit me, promised to make a very welcome addition to my rather meagre wardrobe; so I made them up into a good-sized bundle for transference to the schooner.

By the time that this was done the boat was alongside again, with the carpenter; and presently that individual came clawing his way below with his tools. I showed him what I wanted done, and he immediately set to work; but so substantially put together was the table, and so strong and intricate the locks appertaining to it, that the man was compelled to virtually take the whole affair to pieces before we could get at its contents. But the trouble was amply worth the taking; for I found the despatches, locked in an iron box and sealed with the great seal

of the Governor of Cartagena, together with several other important-looking documents which subsequently proved to be of the utmost value. In fact, as my knowledge of Spanish was altogether too imperfect to admit of my determining what papers were valuable and what were valueless, I took every one that I could find.

This was not all, however. There were five Orders—what they were I knew not, but they were handsome enough, being elaborately set with superb jewels, to show that the late captain of the *Magdalena* was a man of very considerable distinction. Also a magnificent pair of long-barrelled pistols, the barrels of which were damascened like the sword. And last, but not least, an oaken casket, strongly bound with heavy, handsomely-worked iron clamps and hinges, also sealed with the seal of the Governor of Cartagena, and which, upon being broken open, was found to contain a quantity of uncut gems, among which I recognised some rubies of extraordinary size and fire. All these valuables, needless to say, I unhesitatingly appropriated, for the twofold reason that if I did not they would certainly go to the bottom of the sea when the ship broke up, as she probably would in a few days; and in the next place, they were spoils of the enemy, to which we of the *Sword Fish* had as valid a title as anybody.

Having at length thoroughly ransacked the captain's cabin, I proceeded to overhaul the rest of the ship, devoting, indeed, practically the whole day to the work; but nothing else was found worthy of mention, except a chest containing a thousand gold Spanish dollars, in what I took to be the purser's room. And as for the rest of the ship, everywhere forward of the stump of the mainmast, she was so strained and battered as to be nothing better than a basket, the water washing in and out of her as she lay. We removed from the wreck the dollars, the casket of gems, and the few other matters that seemed to be worth taking, and still had daylight enough left to find our way out through the northern channel. Sunset, that night, therefore, found us once more at sea, and heading for Jamaica, I having determined to place the despatches and other documents, found on board the wreck, in the Admiral's hands without loss of time. The trade-wind was again blowing, and blowing strong, too, so that, by carrying on, night and day, we made the passage in exactly three days, almost to a minute, from the Roccas; and I had the satisfaction of handing the despatches to the Admiral that same night. The jolly old fellow was at dinner when I presented myself, and was entertaining a number of officers, naval and military; but upon my name being

announced he at once ordered me to be admitted and directed a knife and fork to be placed on the table for me. He received me with much cordiality, and also introduced me to his guests; but I could see that my presence was deemed an intrusion by most of them, the naval men especially, who were not only jealous of privateersmen, but were also very much inclined to look down upon us as inferior beings to themselves. There were one or two exceptions, however, notably the Honourable Augustus Montague and his first lieutenant, both of the frigate *Calypso*, then in port; the former a most amiable and genial young officer, with no nonsense at all about him, while his lieutenant, Mr Birdwood, was as fine a fellow in every way as I had ever met. The Admiral thanked me most warmly for the despatches, which he handed over at once to his secretary for translation; and I had the intense satisfaction of learning, before I left the Pen that night, that the documents were deemed of sufficient importance to justify their immediate despatch to England by a frigate. The Admiral was kind enough to invite me to sleep at the Pen; but I excused myself, the fact being that the schooner's rigging needed overhauling, and her supply of stores and water required replenishing. I therefore slept in Kingston that night; and having arranged, the first thing next morning, for the supply of the stores and water, I went aboard to give orders to send down topmasts and have the rigging lifted. But an interview with Hoard, the man that we had taken off the wreck of the Spanish frigate, suddenly altered all my plans.

The way that it came about was this. I reached the schooner about ten o'clock in the morning, and at once gave my orders to Mr Saunders, who forthwith set all hands to work. I then went below to my cabin to write some letters home, to be forwarded by the frigate that was to take the Spanish despatches; and whilst I was thus engaged a timid, hesitating knock came to the door.

"Come in!" shouted I; and forthwith entered the man Hoard, carefully closing the door behind him.

"Beg pardon, Cap'n Bowen, for interrupting you," he began; "but there's a matter that I should like to speak to you about, if I ain't making too bold."

"Not at all, Hoard," I answered. "But is the matter important? Won't it wait? You see I am very busy just now, but I can give you as long as you like this afternoon."

"Well, sir," answered the man, fidgeting uneasily with his cap, "it's for you to say whether it's important or not. It's about a

galleon that's loading at Cartagena for Spain; and, understandin' that this schooner is a privateer, I thought that maybe you'd like to have a try for her, and if so, sir, I'd advise you—beggin' pardon for bein' so bold—not to start so much as a rope-yarn of this vessel's rigging, or mayhap you'll be too late for the galleon."

"By George, man," exclaimed I, "this is important news indeed! Why in the world did you not speak to me about it before?"

"Well, sir," he answered, "you see, the way of it is this. Five years ago I belonged to the brig, *Mary Rose*, of Plymouth. She was a slaver; and in one of our runs across to the Coast she caught fire, and burnt us out of her. We took to the boats, and two days afterwards the boat that I was in, bein' separated from the others in a strong breeze, was picked up by a Spanish ship called the *San Sebastian*, and we were taken on to Cartagena. We were a wild set, I can tell you, and perhaps I was the wildest and wickedest of the lot; and we offended the Spaniards because we scoffed and laughed at 'em for plumpin' down on their marrow-bones and prayin', in a stiffish gale that we fell in with, instead of goin' to work to shorten sail, and take care of the ship. Me and my mates did that for 'em while they prayed; but we'd offended 'em mortally, and they never forgave us. So the first thing that they does, when we arrived at Cartagena, was to denounce us as heretics, and we was all clapped into prison. What happened to my mates I never knowed, but I never saw any of 'em again. But as for me, if you'll believe me, sir, the five years that I've been in the hands of the Spaniards I've been in hell! They wanted to convert me, so they said; and the way that they went about it, was to make my life a burden to me. They put me to work in chains on the roads; they sent me into the country, away from the coast, to work in their mines; they even tortured me! If you'll believe me, Cap'n Bowen," and I saw the poor fellow's eyes grow wild, and begin to blaze as he spoke of his sufferings, "for four years I never had the chains off my hands and legs, except when I was bein' tortured!

"But there," he continued, pulling himself together, "I didn't come down into this cabin to tell you about my sufferin's; but I will tell you, sir, that by God's mercy those same sufferin's did convert me, not the sort of conversion that the Spaniards wanted to bring about, but the conversion that, I humbly trust, has caused me to see and repent of my former wicked life. Not but what the old Adam is strong in me yet at times, sir, I won't deny it, and he's never stronger than when I think of the

wrongs and the sufferin's that I've endured at the Spaniards' hands. And it was just that, and nothin' else, that's kept my lips closed all this while about the galleon. We are told, sir, that we must forgive our enemies, and return good for evil; and that's exactly what I've been trying to do, ever since I set foot aboard of this schooner. As soon as ever I came to myself, and was able to understand that I'd escaped from my enemies, and was once more safe under the flag of dear old England, the devil comes to me, and says:—

“Now's your time, Isaac, to be revenged upon your enemies, and to pay 'em off for a little of the misery that they've been makin' you suffer all them five years that they had you in their power. You know that they're goin' to send away this galleon, hopin' that by keepin' well to the south'ard she'll escape capture. You know, too, that her cargo's to be a rich one, and that, over and above her cargo she's to ship an astonishin' quantity of gold and precious stones, brought down to the coast from Peru; and of course you know that Cap'n Bowen and his lads 'ud lay wait for her, and maybe get her, if you was to tell 'em about her. And if they was to get her, only think what a blow the loss of her 'd be to the Spaniards! Why, it 'ud be so tremendous heavy that it 'ud go a good ways towards payin' 'em off for all that they've made you suffer. It 'ud be a fine bit of revenge, now, wouldn't it?’

“Now, I know well enough that this cravin' for revenge is wrong, and I've been fightin' against it with all my strength. But, somehow or another, it won't do, Cap'n! it won't do! The temptation is too great for me, miserable sinner that I am!” He smote his forehead despairingly with his hand. “I feel that I *can't* keep quiet and let that galleon slip by! That gold and them jewels that she's goin' to ship has been dragged out of God's earth by God's creatures with sufferin', and tears, and blood more than any man can measure; and I say that it ain't right that the Spaniards should have it. If all this heap of treasure was to get safely across the Atlantic, and into the Spaniards' treasure-chests, it would just encourage 'em to strive for more; and then there would be more tears, more blood, more despair, more lives rendered a burden and a curse to their owners. But if all this treasure that they keeps sendin' across to Old Spain was to be taken from 'em, then, perhaps, they'd cease to collect it; and the poor, unhappy wretches who're made to dig for it would have some peace. And above and beyond all that, I want the cowardly curs to suffer, in return for all the sufferin' that they've inflicted upon me and thousands that are a good deal better than me. They love wealth. Then make 'em suffer, by takin' it

from 'em. And they love their lives. Make 'em suffer all the horrors of death, by goin' against 'em with fire and steel! Let 'em know the pain, and horror, and despair of feelin' that they're not only goin' to lose their treasure, but that they stand a good chance to lose their lives as well. And, above all, Cap'n, let me be there to witness their anguish. They taunted me, and gloated over me when they'd made my misery such that I begged 'em to finish me off at once, and have done with it; and now I want to pay off some of my debt to 'em, I do."

It was really terrible to witness the frenzy of passion and fury into which this unhappy man goaded himself, as he recalled his past sufferings, and spoke of those who had made him endure them. His eyes gleamed and flashed like those of a savage beast; his face went deadly pale; his lips contracted into a snarl that showed his clenched teeth; he actually foamed from the mouth at last, and his hands clawed the air, as though he saw the Spaniards before him, and was reaching for their throats! I thought it my duty to check so maniacal an intensity of hatred, and I said to him:

"Come, come, Hoard, this will never do! I understood you to say, just now, that you had been converted from the error of your ways, and had become a Christian. Do you call it Christian-like to hate with such intensity as you exhibit? The Bible says that we should love our enemies, bless those who curse us, and do good to those who spitefully use us. How do you reconcile your present feelings with such an injunction as that?"

"Ah!" he groaned, sinking back upon the locker from which he had risen in his excitement; "you have me there, sir; I can't reconcile it; that's just where it is. I can't forgive my enemies, nor I can't love 'em; and I can't bring myself to do good to 'em. No; I've tried, I've kept my lips closed, I've prayed, I've done all that a man can do, and it's no good; I shall never be able to rest until I've seen them cruel, haughty, overbearin' wretches brought low. They're the enemies of God and man, because they drive poor, weak souls to curse their Maker for permittin' such cruelty. I've done it myself, over and over again! the good Lord forgive me! No, sir, it ain't in man's power to forgive a Spaniard who's got you into his power, and I can't believe that such an impossibility is expected of us. I don't believe that the passage you quoted just now was ever meant to apply to Spaniards at all!"

"Well," said I, "I am afraid that such a question is altogether too difficult a one for me to argue with you; you had better see a clergyman, and discuss the whole matter with him. But we have

wandered somewhat from our original subject, which was the galleon. What more can you tell me about her? When is she to sail?"

"It was said," answered Hoard, "that she was to sail exactly a fortnight after the *Magdalena*. That's why I've made so bold as to come down and tell you about it now. If you start to overhaul your rigging, I'm afraid that you'll not be ready in time to catch her. She is a big ship, sir; close upon sixteen hundred tons, I should call her, and I ought to know; for the *Magdalena* laid within a cable's length of her for more than a week. She is heavily armed, too; mounts twenty-eight eighteen-pound carronades; and carries on her books a complement of close upon two hundred men. Her name is *Nostra Señora del Carmen*."

"Ah!" answered I musingly; "then she is likely to prove a pretty tough customer!"

"Not too tough for this schooner and her crew, sir," exclaimed Hoard eagerly. "Why, sir, one Englishman is equal to six Spaniards, any day; and as to her guns, a little management will keep the schooner out of the way of their shot. Besides, sir, I don't suppose you'd engage her in a regular 'hammer and tongs' fight? The proper way 'll be to let her pass ahead, and then run alongside, and carry her by boardin'! She'll be but a slow ship, from the looks of her. For the Lord's sake," he continued anxiously, "don't go to say or to think that she's too big for you! Or, if you think that she is, get a man-o'-war to help you! You've only to repeat in the proper quarter what I've told you, and you'll be certain to get all the help you want—"

"No doubt," interrupted I drily; "but if I undertake the matter at all, I will undertake it single-handed. Meanwhile, it is so well worth consideration that I will countermand my orders for overhauling the rigging; so, if you have nothing more to tell me at present, Hoard, just ask the mate to step below, will you?"

"Ay, that will I, most gladly, sir," answered Hoard. "And I'm quite sure, Cap'n Bowen," he continued, pausing with his hand upon the handle of the door, "that when you've had time to think about the matter, you'll make up your mind to have a try for the *Señora*."

With which he turned and left the cabin, and presently, in obedience to my message, Saunders came down. I gave him my instructions, and then proceeded with my letters, which I had to considerably abbreviate in consequence of the rather

heavy demand that Hoard had made upon my time. However, I got them finished in time for the *Calypso*—which was the vessel selected by the Admiral for the conveyance of the Spanish despatches to England—and had the satisfaction of placing them in the hands of the Honourable Augustus Montague himself, and of receiving his assurance that he would undertake to forward them to their destination upon his arrival home.

During the afternoon a boat came alongside the schooner with a note from the Admiral, inviting me to dine with him that evening, the invitation being accentuated by the statement that he had some news of importance for me. I despatched an acceptance by the boat that had brought the information, and in due time once more found myself within the hospitable portals of the Pen. As usual, the room was full of guests, but after dinner my host found an opportunity to invite me into his office for a short time, when I learned that the important news referred to in his note of invitation consisted simply of some intelligence, gleaned from the Spanish documents taken by me out of the wreck of the *Magdalena*, confirming Hoard's story of the galleon.

"I have told you this for a twofold reason," said the Admiral, when he had read out from his translation the extracts relating to the galleon. "In the first place, I am, as usual, without a ship upon which I can lay my hands; the departure of the *Calypso* to-day depriving me of the only vessel I had in a fit state to go to sea. And, in the next place, as you brought me this news I think it only right that you should be the one to profit by it. So there you are, and, if you will take my advice, you will not remain in port a single hour longer than is absolutely necessary, or you may miss her; and, if what these papers state be true—as I have no doubt it is—she is a ship worth taking a good deal of trouble to find."

I thanked the Admiral for his information, but deemed it best to let him understand that I was indebted to him only for details, and shortly afterwards took my leave, having suddenly made up my mind to sail that same night, if I found that the stores and water had been sent aboard that afternoon, as promised.

I reached the schooner about half-past ten o'clock, and found all hands excepting the mate turned in. Saunders was considerably surprised to see me, as he did not expect me aboard that night; but, upon my questioning him with regard to the stores and water, he informed me that both had come alongside almost immediately after my departure for Kingston. There was consequently no reason why we should delay another

moment; and within half an hour we had got up our anchor and were bowling away to the southward and westward before the land breeze. Before daylight the high land of Jamaica had sunk beneath the horizon, and we had caught the trade-wind.

It now became necessary for me to form some sort of a plan of operations; and for this purpose I determined to consult with Hoard. As soon, therefore, as I had secured my sights for the longitude, after breakfast, I sent for him, and he came down into the cabin.

"I have sent for you, Hoard," said I, "because, as no doubt you already guess, I have made up my mind to have a try for the galleon; and as I understood you to say that you had spent some time ashore, at or near Cartagena, it occurs to me that you may be able to furnish me with some valuable information. And I want to ask you, first, whether, while you were in Cartagena harbour, you heard anything said that might lead you to suppose the Spaniards deem it so far possible that the news of the galleon may have spread far enough to lead to her captain taking extra precautions against capture by steering a course right out to sea, instead of making the best of his way to the eastward along the land, as far as, say, Point Gallinas?"

"I think, Cap'n, I understand what's in your thoughts," answered the man. "No, sir; I never heard anything that 'ud seemed to point to their imaginin' that any news of the ship 'ud be likely to get to an enemy's ears. At the same time, I don't doubt, from what was rumoured about the amount of the treasure that she's to ship, that her skipper'll do everything his wit 'll teach him to keep out of the road of our cruisers and privateers. That, however, ain't very valuable information to give you, because you'll have guessed as much as that yourself. And I'm afraid that I ain't able to tell you any more—except this: that it'll never do for this schooner to be seen dodgin' about anywheres near Cartagena. If she was seen once I don't suppose any harm would come of it, especially if she happened to be under a fairish amount of canvas, because it 'ud probably be supposed that she was bound south to the Gulf of Darien. But if she should happen to be seen twice, it 'ud be all up with us, for a time, at least; they'd be pretty sure to delay her sailin' and send something out to watch us. And as to cuttin' her out, Cap'n, I'm afraid it couldn't be done. Besides, it 'ud be no use to try it unless all the treasure was aboard; and I don't suppose they'll ship that until her hatches are on, and she's all ready for sea, so that she can up anchor and make a start directly the last ingot's hoisted in."

"Quite so," I assented; "that will no doubt be their mode of procedure. But, on the other hand, she may be all ready for sea, even to having all the treasure on board, and yet not sail for a day or two. Because it is quite clear to me that, for some reason or other, they believe this galleon to have a very fair prospect of safely reaching her destination, or they would keep her back until they could send her home under convoy. Now, if they entertain such a belief as that, it seems to me highly probable that some of their big officials will embrace so apparently safe an opportunity to take a passage home in her, and they might not be ready quite so soon as the ship. Now, if that should happen, what is to prevent our cutting her out?"

"Do you happen to know what Cartagena harbour is like, sir?" inquired Hoard, beginning his answer to my question by asking another.

"No," said I. "I have never been near it; nor have I ever seen a chart of it."

"Of course you haven't, sir," answered my companion; "for the simple reason that the Spaniards won't let a chart of it be made, for fear that it should get into an enemy's hands. But I can tell you what it's like, sir. It is about eight miles long, with a width varyin' from four miles down to about one and a half. It is completely landlocked by the island of Tierra Bomba, that forms the seaward face of it, and there's only one channel, called the Boca Chica, about half a cable's length wide, by which a ship can get in or out. And just abreast the narrowest part of this here channel there's a battery, called the San Fernando Battery, mounting twelve sixty-eight pounders. So, you see, sir, that cuttin' a ship out of Cartagena harbour ain't to be thought of."

"Are there any other forts or batteries anywhere along the shores of the harbour?" asked I, my thoughts flitting back to our exploit at Abervrach.

"No, sir," answered Hoard, in surprise at my question. "But you'd find the San Fernando more than enough, if you was to try to get in. They're always on the watch, whenever there's a craft headin' for the harbour; and they won't let her pass until the port cap'n have been off to her, and is satisfied that she's all right."

"Well," said I, "I must have some clearer information than you have been able to give me. I must ascertain the precise date fixed for the sailing of the galleon; and I must have a look at Cartagena harbour, so that I may be able to judge for myself

what will be the best mode of action. Now, how is this to be done?"

"Oh, sir," answered Hoard, "so far as getting news is concerned, I'll undertake to do that for you. I speak Spanish like a native, and contrived to make a friend or two here and there among the fishermen and porters and people of that class, in spite of the priests and the soldiers. There's one man in particular, named Panza—I took the blame of something that he did one day, when he was a fellow-prisoner, and was flogged instead of him, he being at the time a'most dead with fever, he's a fisherman, and lives in the little village of Albornos, some four miles out of Cartagena; he'll do anything for me. He don't know—nobody exceptin' the prison authorities knows—that I was shipped off aboard the *Magdalena*; so all I've got to do is to get ashore and make my way to his hut, tellin' him that I've escaped from prison—which God knows is the truth,—and he'll hide me as long as I like to stay with him, and tell me all the news into the bargain."

"Well, perhaps that might be managed—if you are not afraid to venture back among your enemies," said I.

"Lord bless you, sir, I ain't afraid! not a bit of it," answered Hoard. "The priests and soldiers believes me to be aboard the *Magdalena*; so, as long as I keeps out of their sight—which I'll take precious good care to do—I shall be all right."

"Very well, then," said I; "we can settle the details of your scheme later on. The next question is: How am I to get a view of Cartagena harbour?"

"Ah, sir! that'll be a very difficult and dangerous matter," was the reply. "And yet," he continued correcting himself, "I don't know but what it may be done without so very much risk a'ter all, if the weather is but favourable. But the only way that you could do it would be to land durin' the night on Tierra Bomba, and remain on the island all day, viewin' the harbour from the top of a hill that stands pretty nearly in the centre of the island. You'd have to conceal yourself among the bushes; and as there are very few people movin' about on the island you'd not be so very likely to be seen. Then the boat 'ud have to come ashore for you next night; and the schooner 'ud have to be kept well in the offing during the daytime."

"Should I be able to obtain a good, uninterrupted view of the harbour from the point you name?" I demanded.

"First-rate, sir; couldn't be better," answered Hoard. "The harbour 'ud be spread out like a map below ye, and you'd see from one end to t'other of it; ay, and you'd see the galleon herself, lying in the small inner harbour."

"Then I'll risk it," exclaimed I decisively. "There is a new moon coming on in about a week's time, so that the nights will be dark, and therefore favourable to our adventure. Thank you, Hoard; that is all I want with you now. I will have another chat with you when we reach the coast."

Chapter Twenty Three.

I plan a most daring and hazardous enterprise.

Our run across to the Main was uneventful, and on the sixth morning out from Port Royal we made Point Gallinas, arriving off Cartagena some twenty hours afterwards.

By great good luck the weather happened to be favourable for our immediate embarkation upon our adventure, so after a further and final chat with Hoard, the schooner was headed in for the land. The night was dark as pitch, the sky being overcast, and there was a gentle breeze blowing off the land, affording us smooth water for the delicate operation of landing. But there was no time to be lost, it wanting only four hours to daylight, by which time it would be necessary that the schooner should have secured a good offing; so, having under Hoard's pilotage stood in until the lead gave us twenty-one fathoms—at which point Hoard informed us that we might consider ourselves half a mile from the land—the gig was lowered, and, with her crew armed to the teeth, we shoved off, the second mate being in charge, with Hoard and myself sitting on either side of him in the stern-sheets, the former still acting as pilot. We paddled gently in, with muffled oars, and in the course of about ten minutes the boat gently grounded on a narrow strip of smooth, sandy beach at the base of a low, rugged cliff in a shallow bay. Here Hoard and I landed, the second mate receiving instructions to be at the same spot with the boat and a small supply of cooked provisions every night at midnight, and to remain a couple of hours, when, if he saw nothing of either of us, he was to return to the schooner until the next night.

We stood on the beach until the boat had shoved off again and was lost in the darkness, when we turned away, and, Hoard

leading, proceeded to climb the face of the cliff, which was by no means a difficult matter, as the ground, although somewhat precipitous, was grass-grown and thickly dotted with low, sturdy bushes. Five minutes sufficed us to reach the top, when we found ourselves facing a hillside, rising on our right to a very respectable height. This, however, was not the hill to which Hoard had alluded in his conversation with me. To reach the latter we should have to walk about a mile, he informed me; so, having paused for a minute or two to get our breath after our unwonted exertions, we struck inland, passing over the spur of the hill on our right and dipping down into a shallow valley, along which we passed, steering a southerly course for a pair of steep, lofty hills, the summits of which were within half a mile of each other. The more southerly of these two was the one for which I was bound, and an hour's steady climbing carried us to the top of it, when we lay down in the long grass among the bushes, and, regardless of insects and possible reptiles, snatched a catnap while we waited for daylight.

At daybreak we roused up, and, making our way to a clear space on the very summit of the hill, looked abroad at the scene. Seaward, the ocean stretched away, a vast plain of delicate blue, to the horizon, and some twenty miles in the offing we made out a speck of white, gleaming in the brilliant morning sun, which we decided must be the schooner. Then, turning our backs upon the sea, we had the hilly foreground of the island before us, sloping away to right and left and in front of us down to the smooth, placid waters of the spacious harbour. On our right was the Boca Chica, the only entrance to the harbour, a narrow, winding channel with a sort of bar at its inner extremity, whereon, Hoard informed me, there is scarcely four fathoms of water. Nevertheless, viewed from the elevation which I occupied, the navigation of the channel appeared simple enough, the submerged sand-banks on each side of it showing up quite clearly through the blue water. At the inner extremity of the channel lies the outer harbour, a sheet of water roughly circular in shape, and measuring some four miles across in either direction. I noticed a few small shoals dotted about here and there in this outer harbour, but there was only one that appeared to be at all dangerous, and that one was to be easily avoided. The northern boundary of the outer harbour seemed to be pretty well defined by a cluster of decidedly dangerous shoals stretching right across from the island of Tierra Bomba to the mainland, but with fairly wide channels of deep water between, and north of this lay what might be termed the intermediate harbour. This is a sheet of water of about half the area of the outer harbour, with a good clean bottom and plenty

of water. It is formed by a shoal uniting the island of Tierra Bomba with the mainland, a reef of rocks projecting above the sand and rendering the Boca Grande—once the main entrance to the harbour—quite impassable by anything larger than a boat. Then, inside this again, and rendered especially safe and snug by being inclosed by two long, low, projecting spits with a narrow channel between them, is the inner harbour, having an area of about three-quarters of a square mile, with plenty of water for the largest ships. The head of this harbour washes the walls and wharves of the town of Cartagena; indeed it does more, for, as Hoard informed me, it divides the town into two nearly equal parts, the tide flowing right through it and for some distance beyond. In this inner harbour lay quite a fleet of small coasting-craft, and towering high among them all could be made out the tall spars of the galleon. Immediately in front of us, and on the opposite side of the harbour, the country was low, swampy, and thickly covered with scrub and bush, among which could be made out the whitewashed mud walls of the villages of Buenavista, Gospique, and Albornos, in the latter of which Hoard's friend Panza had his habitation. The fishing-boats from these villages were dotted all over the bay—they had probably been out all night,—and having pointed out to me the several objects of interest in the noble scene that stretched around us, my companion intimated that the time had arrived for him to leave me, as he intended to get a passage across to the mainland forthwith, and then make his way to the town for the purpose of acquiring information. He cautioned me to keep a bright look-out for chance stragglers, and to carefully avoid them, for he assured me that, if discovered, I should certainly be dragged off to the town, and probably meet with the same fate that he had suffered. And finally, he undertook to return, if possible, the next night to the spot whereon we then stood, adding that, should he fail to appear, I was not to be alarmed. I watched him make his way down the hillside, lost sight of him among the bush, and finally made him out again, with the aid of my glass, just as he was entering a little hamlet on the harbour shore of the island. I watched him sauntering hither and thither among the dozen or so of huts that composed the hamlet, saw him engage in conversation with several people, and at length observed him making his way down to the beach, accompanied by a couple of men. The trio entered a boat and pushed off, and I watched the crazy craft heading straight across the harbour to the village of Gospique, from whence I concluded he would make the best of his way to Albornos.

I had now the rest of the day before me in which to look round and make my observations, and I determined to do so to the

utmost extent of my ability. But I was by this time hungry and thirsty, so before doing anything else I sought out a comfortable spot in the shadow of a clump of bush, and sat down to discuss a portion of the viands that I had been careful to bring with me. Then, my meal finished, I produced pencil and paper, and proceeded to very carefully draw a map of the harbour, preserving as accurately as I could the just proportions of every feature, and marking the shoals in their proper places, as also the battery guarding the entrance channel, and the position of the villages dotted here and there along the shore. I had taken the precaution to bring a small pocket-compass with me, and this I found most useful as a means of laying down the bearings of the various features from my point of observation. By drawing the whole roughly to scale, judging my distances as accurately as possible, and freely using my pocket-compass, I found that by the end of the day I had secured a sketch map that had the appearance of being fairly accurate. Not a soul came near me throughout the day, but several small craft passed out of or into the harbour, and these afforded verification of Hoard's statement as to the extraordinary precautions observed by the authorities, every one of them being obliged to heave-to until a boat from the battery had boarded them. A large ship, apparently a Spanish Indiaman, also arrived pretty late in the afternoon, so that I had an opportunity of witnessing for myself the manner in which such craft made their way through the channel to the inner anchorage.

At length, when the sun was within an hour of setting, I observed a fishing-boat under sail emerge from among the group of islets that block the approach to the village of Albornos, and it presently became evident that she was making for the island, on the highest point of which I was perched. I brought my telescope to bear upon her, but for some time was unable to distinguish her occupants, the sail being in my way. At length, however, one of them moved forward and stood for a few minutes under the lee of the sail, and the boat being by this time more than half-way across, I was able to recognise the ragged habiliments worn by Hoard when we took him off the wreck of the *Magdalena*, and which he had resumed for the occasion. The sun was just dipping beneath the western horizon, and the shadow of the island of Tierra Bomba had enshrouded the waters of the harbour in a soft dusk, when the boat entered a shallow lagoon at the north-eastern extremity of the island, and grounded on the low, swampy shore. I saw Hoard disembark and stand talking with his companions for a few minutes, and then the boat shoved off again and made her

way to about mid-channel, when her crew doused her sail and proceeded to shoot their nets. Meanwhile I had lost sight of Hoard behind a hill that lay between me and the lagoon where he had landed, and I saw no more of him until he suddenly appeared against the star-lit sky only a few paces from me.

"Well, sir," said he, as he ranged up alongside, "I've got some news for you, and no mistake; but I greatly doubt whether it'll be very acceptable."

"How so?" I exclaimed; "has anything gone wrong?"

"Well, I don't exactly know about 'gone wrong'," was his reply; "but the way of it is this: The galleon is finished loadin', and her hatches is on. The gold is expected to arrive in the town to-morrow evening, and if it does, it'll be got aboard the day after to-morrow; and next day three hundred sojers is to be marched aboard of her, and she'll then sail for Europe!"

"Three hundred soldiers!" exclaimed I incredulously. "No wonder that they consider the vessel capable of making her way home without a convoy!"

"Ay, you may well say so, sir," was the reply. "It seems that the whole thing have been planned out for a long time. These three hundred sojers is to go home as invalids, so I hear; and the relief has arrived to-day in the Injieman that, mayhap, you saw come into the harbour this a'ternoon. She's been expected this three weeks, so my friend Panza tells me."

"Well," said I, "that is, as you say, news indeed; and it was a most fortunate thing that we came ashore, as we did. Had we simply dodged off and on, waiting for the galleon to come out, those three hundred soldiers would have done for us. You say that the gold train is expected to arrive to-morrow. Is this expectation pure conjecture, or have they reason for it?"

"Oh, they've reason enough for it, sir; so I understand," answered Hoard. "You see, the shippin' off of this here gold is the talk of the town; nobody's thinkin' of anything else; and everything that happens concernin' it is knowed at once all over the place. That's how I got my news. Panza had heard all about it, and as soon as he sees me he starts talkin' about it, not knowin' that I'd been shipped off in the *Magdalena*; and I just let him talk, puttin' in a question here and there until I'd found out all about it. As to the gold train, I don't think there's much doubt about it, because the news in the town is that a runner came in from Barranca this morning with a message from the

commandant that the train had arrived there last night, and might be expected at Cartagena some time to-morrow, most likely pretty late in the evening. I was wondering whether it 'ud be possible for us to lay in wait for the train somewhere on the road, and get hold of the gold that way; but that plan ain't any good, because the three hundred sojers that's to go home in the ship are comin' down with it; and sixty men again' three hundred is rather long odds."

"Yes," I agreed, "too long for my purpose, at all events; for I have no doubt that the rascals would make a stubborn fight for it; and even if we should succeed in capturing the gold, we should certainly lose a good number of our men, while I want to get the gold, and the ship too, without any loss at all, if it can be managed."

"Ay, sir," answered Hoard. "But I don't see how it can."

"Well, I have a plan," said I, "and you, perhaps, with your knowledge of the place, will be able to tell me what chance there is of its being successful. And, first of all, do you happen to know how many men are stationed in that battery there that guards the entrance channel?"

"Yes, sir, I think I can tell you pretty nearly," answered Hoard; "because, d'ye see, afore I was sent aboard the *Magdalena* I was one of the slaves that had to man the water-boat that took 'em their daily supply of fresh water, there bein' none on the island. How many men? Well, I should say that, countin' all hands, officers and men together, there's a matter of nigh on to eighty of 'em."

"No more than that?"

"No, sir; certainly not more than eighty. Call 'em eighty, and you'll not be very far wrong; over the mark a trifle, if anything."

"Very well, then," said I. "This is my plan. You say that the gold is to be put aboard the galleon the day after to-morrow. The fact of its shipment must be absolutely established, and, in order that it may be so, I propose that you shall remain ashore—if you think you can do so without fear of discovery—and witness for yourself the loading of it. Then, when it is all aboard the ship, you will make the best of your way across to this island, and wait for me at the spot where we landed last night. I shall come ashore with all the boats and the whole of the crew, except the idlers, fully armed. Then, if the gold has been shipped, we will land on a little strip of sandy beach at the

seaward end of the channel, which I noticed to-day, march across the point, and take the battery, spiking the guns. And, when this is done, we will pull up the harbour, board the galleon, and carry her out to sea before the soldiers are embarked."

"The very thing, sir! the very thing!" exclaimed Hoard delightedly. "What a fool I was not to think of such a simple plan as that myself! Yes, sir, it'll do, I don't doubt. The sojers is sure not to be put aboard that night; they'll give 'em a day or two to rest after their journey down the country, not for the sake of the men, sir, but because the officers 'll want it."

"Then you think that my plan will do?" asked I.

"Yes, sir, I do; I haven't a doubt about it," was the confident answer.

"Then, in that case," said I, "I shall go aboard the schooner to-night, leaving you ashore to find out all the news you can. I shall not come ashore to-morrow night, because there appears to be no need, and the less frequently that the schooner approaches the land the less will be the danger of discovery. But the night after to-morrow, at midnight, I shall be at the spot where we landed, with all the boats, and fully prepared to capture the battery. So you must find means to meet me there. Are you quite sure that you will run no risk by remaining ashore?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I shall be all right. Never fear for me! I know the town now, and know how to take care of myself. But how will you manage, sir, supposin' that it happens to be blowin' strong, with the wind on the shore, when you wants to land, the night after to-morrow?"

"Does that ever happen here?" I inquired, considerably taken aback by the suggestion.

"It do sometimes, sir, but not often," answered Hoard. "Mostly the land breeze springs up about eight o'clock, and blows until about seven in the mornin'."

"Well," answered I, after considering awhile, "in the case that you mention, it appears to me that our best plan will be to make boldly for the channel, the four boats keeping abreast, so as to show as little as possible; let the wind blow them past the battery, and land in the little bay about half a mile inside. I

noticed a big rock, the only one, jutting out of the sand there to-day. That should be a very good spot at which to meet you."

"Yes, sir, I know the rock well; I've seen it hundreds of times," remarked Hoard. "You can't do better, sir, unless the wind happens to be off shore. If it is, the other plan will be best."

"Very well, then, that is understood," said I. "And now, how will you manage about getting back to the mainland?"

"Oh," remarked my companion, "I shall have to stay on this here island all night. But Panza will keep a look-out for me and take me across to-morrow morning."

"Then," said I, "you had better walk with me as far as the beach, and get the fresh stock of provisions that they will bring ashore. And how are you off for money, in case you should want any?"

"Why, the fact is that I haven't got any, and I was goin' to ask you to let me have some, sir; it might come handy," was the reply.

I happened to have a few dollars that I had taken the precaution to slip into my pocket before leaving the ship; these I handed to him, and we then sauntered slowly toward the spot where the boat was to meet us.

I went on board the schooner that night, and devoted the whole of the following day to the preparations for our great *coup*, setting all hands to work sharpening cutlasses, cleaning pistols, effectually muffling the boats' oars and rowlocks, and, in fact, making every possible provision that I could think of to ensure our success. And the next day I made the men rest all day, so that they might be fit for a long and arduous night's work.

It may be imagined that I kept an exceedingly anxious eye on the barometer throughout that day, for I realised that the weather would have much to do with the making or marring of our fortunes on the eventful night. The mercury remained steady in the tube until close upon sunset, and then it began to drop a little, the drop continuing until it had gone down nearly three-tenths of an inch. I scarcely knew what to make of this; whether to expect a shift of wind and a strong breeze, or whether it merely meant rain, or a thunder-storm. The sun, however, had scarcely set when we got a hint of what was to come, in the shape of a bank of dark, purplish, slate-coloured clouds that began to pile themselves along the eastern horizon,

their edges as sharply defined against the clear sky as though the masses had been clipped out of paper. We were to be treated to a thunder-storm, and a pretty severe one, too, if the promise of those clouds was to be relied upon. We had been hove-to all day, some twenty miles in the offing, under mainsail and jib only; so that, by keeping our canvas low, we might escape observation from the land, although I had but little fear of this unless anyone happened to have wandered up to the top of one of the hills of Tierra Bomba, from which it would have been possible to see us. But the moment that the sun had fairly disappeared below the horizon, sail was packed upon the schooner, and we proceeded to work in toward the land, my chief anxiety now being lest the thunder-storm should gather and break before we had succeeded in effecting a landing, in which case we stood a very fair chance of being discovered, and of finding everybody on the alert to give us a warm reception. We reached in, on the starboard tack, until we were within about two miles of Punta de Canoas, when we hove about and reached along the land to the southward. By this time the thunder-clouds had completely overspread the sky; it was as dark as the inside of a cavern, and the storm might burst upon us at any moment. It hung off, however, and at length, much to my relief, we found ourselves close to the northern extremity of Tierra Bomba, and within half a mile of the shore. It was so dark that it was quite impossible to see anything, the land merely showing as a slightly deeper shadow against the intense blackness of the overcast sky. But I had so thoroughly studied all the natural features of the harbour and its surroundings during my day's sojourn ashore that I now seemed to be perfectly familiar with them all. I therefore had no hesitation whatever in hauling the schooner in under the lee of the island until we were actually becalmed, when, the lead giving us a depth of barely four fathoms, I let go the anchor and stripped the schooner of all her canvas, not furling it, however, but simply passing a few turns of the gaskets, so that everything might be ready for making sail again at a moment's notice.

We were now, according to my judgment—for, as I have said, we could actually see nothing,—in the shallow bay where Hoard and I had landed three nights previously; and I believed, moreover, that we were so close to the land as to be completely shut in and hidden, both from the north and from the south. Needless to say, I had long ago issued orders to extinguish all unnecessary lights, and for those that were indispensable to be closely masked. There was therefore nothing to betray to the sight our whereabouts; and as to sound, every sheave and tackle that was in the least likely to be used had been so

thoroughly greased that it worked in absolute silence, while the men, although shod for our tramp across the narrow point at the southern extremity of the island, had lashed thick wads of oakum to the soles of their shoes, and consequently moved about the decks as silently as ghosts. Moreover, the boats had all been so thoroughly prepared, hours beforehand, for the expedition, that there remained nothing whatever to be done but to lower them into the water, unhook the tackles, and shove off. When we let go our anchor it still wanted a good hour to midnight; nevertheless, so anxious was I lest the threatening storm should break, and the lightning betray our movements, that I determined to man the boats forthwith, and beach them if necessary, believing that thus we should run less risk of detection.

All these precautions, it must be understood, were adopted not so much from any apprehension of ultimate failure, for I had determined to have the galleon, but because I wanted to save my men. I now summoned Saunders down into the cabin, and read over to him the instructions that I had carefully prepared for his guidance during the earlier part of the day, explained them to him fully, and then handed him the paper. The men who were to accompany me on the expedition were next mustered in the 'tween-decks and sent to supper, after which their weapons were carefully inspected, and a liberal quantity of ammunition served out to them; and then, when I had satisfied myself that all was right, I made them a little speech, explaining what I purposed doing, and how I wanted it done; when, having enjoined them to observe the most absolute silence, the light was extinguished, all hands groped their way on deck, the boats were lowered and manned, and we shoved off, each boat attached by her painter to the one ahead, so that we might not part company in the profound darkness. It was presently found, however, that this precaution was unnecessary, the water being so brilliantly phosphorescent as to afford all the guidance that was needed; indeed, there was altogether too much luminosity to please me. We were even closer to the shore than I had imagined, for we had not been under way five minutes, when the gig, in which I led the way, grounded upon the sand. And as she did so, I became aware of a weird, gaunt-looking figure, clad in rags, standing at the water's edge, close to the boat's stem.

"All right, Cap'n, it's me—Hoard—sir," explained this figure, in a low, hoarse whisper, as I sprang ashore and gripped the fellow by the throat. "There was nothing to keep me," he continued, as I relaxed my grip upon him; "so I came right on here,

thinkin' that, mayhap, you'd be a little bit afore your time, and wouldn't want to be kept waitin'. Everything is just as right, sir, as if you'd planned the whole thing yourself; the gold is all shipped; the *Señora* has been hauled out to the Manzanilla anchorage, ready to sail as soon as the sojers is shipped to-morrow morning; and the commandant is givin' a farewell *festa*, as they calls it, to all the officers to-night; so that the chances are not one of 'em will think of goin' aboard until daylight."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed; "what carelessness! what folly! I should have thought they would have been afraid to leave so vast an amount of treasure unguarded."

"Why so, sir?" demanded Hoard. "They believe that the whole thing has been kept as secret as the grave—and so it would have been, too, but for the wreck of the *Magdalena*—so they don't expect any such attack as you're preparin' for 'em. And as to anybody ashore attemptin' to meddle with the ship—why, they'd sooner jump overboard and drownd themselves. So that it ain't so very wonderful, a'ter all, to my mind, that they believes their gold to be perfectly safe. Besides, there's the San Fernando battery: who'd ever dream of that bein' attacked and took?"

"Well," said I, "it all seems fairly reasonable as you put it, Hoard; still I cannot understand such an extraordinary lack of precaution. But, of course, it is so much the better for us. What about her crew?"

"Oh! they're all aboard, sir; but they'll be turned in and sound asleep by this time,—anchor watch and all, as likely as not," was the reply.

"Do you happen to know how many they muster?" asked I.

"Panza told me that he'd heard it said that her full complement was two hundred and twenty-six men, countin' officers and all. But if we can only manage to surprise 'em, and get aboard afore the alarm's given, I don't reckon that they'll give us so very much trouble," answered Hoard.

"We must risk that," remarked I. "And now, as you happen to be here, there is nothing to detain us; we may, therefore, as well be moving. The sooner that we get this battery business over, the better."

"Very well, sir, I'm quite ready," answered Hoard. "I suppose you didn't happen to think of slippin' a cutlash, or a pair of pistols, or anything into the boat for me, sir?" he continued.

"Oh, yes, I did!" said I. "Thomson, the coxswain of the gig, will fit you out. And you had better come in the gig with me, as we shall probably want you to act as pilot."

"All right, sir, I'll do that with all the pleasure in life," was the answer. And therewith he clambered noiselessly into the boat and made his way aft to the stern-sheets, where I presently found him with a naked cutlass in his hand, the edge of which he was testing with his thumb, and mumbling his satisfaction at its condition.

We now shoved off, and the gig leading, gave way at a long steady stroke, for the southern extremity of the island, which we reached within the hour, although it was a pull of fully three miles. Arrived at the low point, and leaving each boat in charge of a couple of men, we landed; and as I was marshalling the men upon the beach, the blackness of the night was momentarily dispelled by a blaze of vivid lightning that flashed from the clouds immediately overhead; and almost simultaneously with the flash there came a crash of thunder that seemed to make the solid ground beneath our feet vibrate and tremble. This was horribly annoying; for to advance upon the battery in the midst of a storm of lightning was almost certainly to betray ourselves, while time was now of some importance, I being anxious to be aboard the galleon not much later than two o'clock in the morning, that being the hour when man is supposed to sleep his soundest and to be least liable to awake prematurely.

However, there was nothing for it but to wait, so I hurriedly ordered the men to lie down behind the ridge of sand which formed the junction of the beach with the grass-land; and there we crouched, with the lightning flashing and quivering all about us for fully a quarter of an hour. Then down came the rain, not in drops, but in sheets, with the lightning flashing and darting and quivering hither and thither through it, until we appeared to be enveloped in a gigantic diamond; so exquisitely beautiful were the glancing colours of the lightning through the rain. Of course we were wetted to the skin in an instant, but that did not very greatly matter, as our pistols and ammunition were carried in waterproof cases; moreover, the rain afforded us an excellent curtain under cover of which to advance; so at a word from me the men sprang to their feet, and we pushed rapidly forward. The battery was but a quarter of a mile from the spot where we

had landed, and so accurately had I taken my bearings that, in about five minutes after we began to move, the structure loomed up, dark and grim, before us. Hoard had informed me that its landward sides were protected by a deep moat, connected with the sea, and spanned by a drawbridge; and it was for this bridge that I was keeping a sharp look-out. I was so close aboard of it before I saw it that three or four paces sufficed to carry me to the sentry-box at its landward end; and just as I reached this box a vivid flash of lightning revealed its interior, and there, bolt upright, stood a tall Spanish grenadier, with his musket resting in a corner of the hut, close to his hand. I realised instantly that the briefest period of hesitation now meant our undoing; for as I had seen the soldier, he had also undoubtedly seen me; so the man no sooner stood revealed before me than, with one bound, I was in the sentry-box with him, one hand grasping his throat to prevent him from crying out, while with the other I seized his musket and passed it out to the man next behind me. The soldier struggled manfully, and did his utmost to free his throat, but I held him fast, and in so fierce a grip that ere many seconds were over I felt him sink powerless to the ground. To lash him, hands and feet together, like a trussed fowl, with his own cross-belts, and to gag him with a good-sized stone, secured in his mouth by a strip slashed from his own coat, was but the work of two or three minutes; and when at length, satisfied that the fellow was secure and harmless, I emerged from the box, I had the satisfaction of finding that Tom Hardy,—now acting as the schooner's second mate,—had promptly followed my example by securing the sentry at the far side of the drawbridge.

We were now consequently in possession of this structure, and that, too, without the slightest alarm having been given to the garrison, and in another minute all hands of us stood inside the battery, which was a fine, solid earthwork, with casemates, very like the battery that we had seized at Abervrach harbour. Unlike the French battery, however, all the casemates were open, with the exception of four, two of which were converted into the officers' quarters, while the other two constituted the magazine; and in the shelter of these open casemates the artillerymen were slumbering soundly in hammocks, despite the storm, with their muskets piled under the shelter of a verandah that ran all along the front of the casemates. To possess ourselves of these muskets, and to heave them into the moat was the work of but a few minutes; and when this was done I went up on to the platform, and with my own hands effectually spiked every one of the guns. It was a most unaccountable thing to me that the whole garrison should have slept so soundly through the terrific

crash and roar of the thunder, and the blaze of the lightning; but they did, perhaps because they were accustomed to that kind of disturbance; and as the thunder was practically continuous, I had no difficulty in carrying out my operations without a single clink of the leather-covered hammer being audible.

The battery was now useless for some hours at least; and, since we had been so fortunate as to render it so without any of the garrison becoming any the wiser, I thought it would be an advantage to leave them in ignorance for a few hours longer, I therefore quietly withdrew my men, and, taking the two gagged and bound sentinels with us, effected an orderly retreat to the beach.

Chapter Twenty Four.

The capture of Nostra Señora del Carmen.

Arrived at the boats, we lost not a moment in tumbling into them and getting under way again, for time was now a precious commodity, there being still a journey of some four miles before us ere the galleon could be reached. But, once fairly clear of the Boca, or channel, we should be able to use our sails, which I had taken the precaution to have placed in the boats, and then we should make good progress, while the men would be resting.

The first question for consideration, however, was what to do with our two prisoners. This was speedily settled by Hoard, who suggested that they should be landed upon a small islet, called Brujas Island, situate on the opposite side of the harbour, and lying but little out of our regular way. This we did, of course first casting them loose and taking the gags out of their mouths; but although they were thus freed from actual physical restraint they remained as harmless as before, so far as we were concerned, for Brujas Island was uninhabited, and separated from the mainland by two channels which, although only narrow, were so dangerous, in consequence of the sharks with which the harbour was infested, that the Spaniards were not at all likely to imperil their lives by attempting to swim them. There they were, therefore, harmless enough, so far as we were concerned, until morning, when probably some passing fisherman might be attracted by their cries, and would release them. But, whether released or not, I had very little fear that they would attempt to return to the battery and give the alarm

there; the fact that they had allowed themselves to be surprised and made prisoners would be accounted by their officers an unpardonable crime; and the probability was that, when released from the island, they would take to the forest and make for the interior to escape punishment.

By the time that we had landed these two unfortunate men the thunder-storm had passed away to seaward, the crash of the thunder had become modulated to a booming rumble, and a steady, drenching downpour of rain had set in; the clouds overhead, however, were not nearly so heavy and black as they had been previous to the outbreak of the storm, and there was sufficient light to enable us to see where we were going. We accordingly shoved off from Brujas in high spirits, and, hoisting our sails, headed up the harbour. The land wind was blowing, although not very strongly, and when we had been under way about half an hour we began to look out for the galleon. Hoard was the first to see her—probably because he knew best of us all where to look for her,—and, the moment that she was sighted, the gig's sails were lowered, as a signal for the other boats to close round us. This they immediately did, when I repeated, in a low voice, the orders that I had already given before leaving the schooner, in order that every man might know exactly what duty was expected of him, and do it. Then, having thus refreshed every man's memory, I gave the order to draw cutlasses and paddle quietly alongside.

A few minutes sufficed to take us to the galleon; and a fine, stately, noble-looking craft she was, towering out of the water like a line-of-battle ship; her lofty masts and wide-spreading yards seeming to pierce the sky and lose themselves among the few stars that now came twinkling mistily out, here and there overhead.

We got alongside without being challenged—to my great surprise; and, half of us boarding her to port and the other half to starboard, in less than a minute we were all on deck, and gliding softly and noiselessly as shadows here and there; some securing the fore-scuttle, others the companions and sky-lights; while others again were briskly swarming up the shrouds to loose the canvas; the carpenter—with his axe specially sharpened for the occasion—at once stationing himself by the cables, ready to cut them at a sign from me, while two men placed themselves at the ponderous and highly-ornamented wheel.

The singular circumstance that we had succeeded in getting alongside without being challenged was fully accounted for by

the fact that not a single soul was on deck when we had glided in over the galleon's lofty bulwarks. If an anchor watch had been set, the men composing it had—as Hoard had predicted—quietly ignored their duty, in the absence of the officers, by turning in and leaving the ship to take care of herself. The surprise was complete; the galleon had fallen into our hands without so much as a single blow being struck. Of course, there was the crew below to be reckoned with still, but meanwhile they were close prisoners and asleep; and, even in the event of their awaking at once and proceeding to force their way on deck, it would be some time ere they would be able to break out; and by that time, if all went well, we should be far enough from the neighbourhood of the town to render any prospect of assistance from that quarter practically out of the question. What I most feared was that somebody on board one or another of the many craft that were anchored in our immediate vicinity might notice the operation of loosing and setting the galleon's canvas, and suspecting something to be wrong, man a boat and go ashore to give the alarm; in which case we should soon have three or four swift galleys after us; when we were likely enough to find ourselves in an exceedingly awkward scrape. That, however, was a danger that we had to face. And after all it was not so very great; for if no anchor watch was being kept on board the galleon, how much less likely was it that such a watch would be kept on board the comparatively valueless coasters by which we were surrounded.

I had carefully explained to my crew beforehand what it was that we had to do; and I had also given instructions that the whole of the work was to be carried forward in absolute silence, no one calling out unless the necessity for so doing was urgent. Consequently, from the moment when we first dropped in over the bulwarks, not a sound save the soft patter of muffled feet was heard aboard the galleon until first the topsails and then the courses were let fall, when, of course, there arose a sound of canvas fluttering in the wind, which, to my excited imagination, seemed loud enough to wake the dead. Then came the sharp cheep, cheep of sheaves upon their pins as the topsails were sheeted home and the yards mast-headed, followed by a still louder flapping of canvas as the jib was hoisted. Then came the dull, heavy crunch of the carpenter's axe as he smote at the cables. I suppose it was these sounds that awakened the galleon's crew, for while the carpenter was still hacking away there arose from the interior of the fore-scuttle a loud knocking, and the muffled sounds of voices angrily demanding that the hatch should be lifted. Hoard, however, had been standing by, in expectation of something of

this sort, and the moment that there came a pause in the knocking and shouting I heard him informing the prisoners that the ship was in the hands of the English, and that unless they—the Spaniards—immediately ceased their row the whole lot of them would be quickly subjected to certain dreadful pains and penalties which I but imperfectly understood. The threat, however, had the desired effect of quieting our prisoners, who promptly subsided into silence.

It was a somewhat difficult matter to get so big a ship under way in the rather thickly crowded anchorage, and we were obliged at the outset to make a rather long and complicated stern-board, which entailed two or three very narrow shaves of fouling one or another of the craft that were in our way. The sky, however, was clearing fast, the stars were shining brightly through great and rapidly increasing rifts in the clouds and affording us enough light to see what we were about; moreover, the land breeze was piping up strong, and whistling shrilly through our rigging, so that as soon as we were able to swing the yards and get headway upon the lumbering old wagon of a craft, we managed well enough, and contrived to scrape clear of everything; and that, too, without attracting any very serious amount of attention, only one hail—and that, apparently, from somebody more than half drunk—saluting us as we glided with a slow and stately movement out of the anchorage toward the somewhat contracted passage between the island of Tierra Bomba and the Main.

Once fairly clear of the anchorage, and the shipping that encumbered it, we crowded sail upon the old hooker, and were soon booming down toward the chain of shoals at the rate of fully seven knots. And now Hoard once more made himself useful by undertaking to pilot us through the shoals, which he did very successfully, hugging Brujas Island pretty closely, and then bearing almost square away for the Boca Chica channel. A short half-hour sufficed to carry us to the inner end of it; and here our utmost vigilance was called into play in the navigation of the sharply-winding passage. But we managed to achieve it successfully, all still being dark and silent in the San Fernando battery as we passed it, and after an anxious ten minutes I had the satisfaction of feeling *Nostra Señora del Carmen* rising and falling ponderously upon the swell of the open Caribbean.

In anticipation of the possibility that we might be pursued, I now shaped a course due west, right off the land, that being, in my opinion, the direction in which we were least likely to be looked for, and when we had been running to leeward for about

half an hour, and had made an offing of nearly four miles, I burned three portfires simultaneously as a preconcerted signal to the schooner that all was well and that she was to follow us, and an hour later she came foaming up on our weather quarter and hailed us. We now hove-to and sent alongside her the boats that had hitherto been towing astern; and as soon as they were hoisted in we both filled away once more, still standing straight off the land, so that when day dawned I had the satisfaction of finding that we had run the coast out of sight.

We had, of course, long ere this secured our prisoners, numbering in all two hundred and twenty-six men, and now the problem was how to get rid of them; for I did not at all care to have so many men aboard who would require to be constantly watched in order that they might not rise upon and overpower us at some unguarded moment. Happily, the problem was soon solved; for about noon we sighted a trading felucca, bound from Porto Bello to Santa Marta, which the schooner brought to, and as she proved to be a fine, roomy craft I hove-to, lowered the boats, and transhipped our prisoners into her, despite the protests of her unhappy captain, who called all the saints to witness that the food he had on board would not suffice to feed so many men more than a couple of days at most. This objection I met by pointing out to him that he could bear up for Tolu, on the Gulf of Morrosquillo, which he could easily fetch in twenty-four hours, and so left him to settle the matter in whichever way seemed best to him.

As soon as we had parted company with the felucca, and were fairly under way again, I set to work to search for the treasure, of the actual presence of which on board I had as yet had no time to satisfy myself. Hoard was of opinion that it would be found stowed away in a strong-room beneath the cabin deck, in the position usually occupied by the lazarette, and there, sure enough, I found such a room—a solidly built structure of hard timber, fully six inches thick, plated with iron, the door being secured by three massive iron bars passed through thick iron bands, and secured at either end by heavy iron padlocks, six in all, the keyholes of which were sealed with great seals the size of the palm of my hand. These seals I broke without a particle of hesitation or reverence for the great personage who had caused them to be placed there, and then instituted a hunt for the keys, which resulted, as I had feared it would, in failure. The keys were doubtless at that moment at Cartagena, in the possession of the unfortunate captain of the ship, or in the hands of the official to whose custody the treasure had been confided. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to set the

armourer to work upon the padlocks, and by dint of hard work he managed to get them off and the door open by eight bells in the afternoon watch.

The room, when opened, proved to be an apartment measuring about five feet each way, and it was lined inside as well as outside, with thick sheets of iron. But it was more than half full of gold ingots; that is to say the ingots were packed in rows of twenty each athwart the room. There were five rows of twenty each, constituting a tier, and the ingots were stored eight tiers high; so that, if the lower tiers contained the same number of ingots as the top tier, as was pretty certain to be the case, there were eight hundred ingots of solid gold, each weighing approximately half a hundredweight! the ingots being made uniformly of this size and weight in order that they might be conveniently transported from the mines to the coast by means of trains of Indians. I was struck dumb with astonishment and admiration as I stood gazing at the pile of dingy packages, each ingot being tightly sewn up in a wrapper of raw hide. I could scarcely believe my eyes for the moment. Twenty tons of gold! Why, there was a fabulous fortune before me! I reckoned its value roughly, and found that, at the then ruling price of gold, the value of the packages before me approximated well on toward three millions sterling.

Nor was this all. There was a heavy, oaken, iron-bound case, measuring about two feet square by about a foot and a half high. This, I presumed, contained the uncut gems which Hoard had told me were to be sent home in this lumbering old treasure-tub. Man alive! when I came to realise in a measure the approximate value of all this wealth, I tell you I was frightened; fairly terrified to think that I was now responsible for it all. For upon me devolved the task of conveying this enormous wealth safely across the ocean and delivering it into the hands of my owner, to be by him subdivided into the shares to which each of us was entitled. I believe I never realised so vividly as at that moment the manifold perils of the sea: the peril of fire, of tempest, of shipwreck, and of the enemy. And to think that it had all been intrusted to a bottom that, under the most favourable circumstances, could hardly be expected to get up a speed of ten knots, and that consequently was open to capture by the first fast-sailing picaroon that happened to fall in with her. It was positively frightful to merely contemplate such a very likely eventuality. "But, thank goodness," thought I, "that danger is easily provided against!" And, going on deck, I immediately ordered the ship to be hove-to, and the launch hoisted out, and I also signalled the schooner to close.

It was a lovely evening; the water quite smooth, and a gentle westerly breeze blowing. I determined, therefore, to seize that opportunity to transfer the whole of the treasure to the *Sword Fish*, in the hold of which craft I considered it would be far safer than where it was then. And, that done, I determined to make my way, first to Jamaica, to pick up a few more hands to help in working the galleon, and then to make the best of my way home without risking the loss of all by engaging in any more fighting, however tempting might be the opportunity. The men went to work cheerily; easily divining my motive for transshipping the treasure, and being, of course, each in his own degree, as anxious for its safety as I was. Moreover, the galleon's launch was a fine big lump of a boat; so we managed to tranship the whole and get it safely stowed away before sundown. That night I resumed command of the schooner, and turned the command of the galleon over to Saunders, who was a thoroughly steady, reliable fellow.

At midnight, as arranged by me prior to leaving the galleon, both craft hauled up to the northward for Jamaica, and we then found that—so slow was the galleon, with the wind anywhere but on her quarter—the schooner, under mainsail, stay foresail, and jib, was quite able to keep pace with her even when she was carrying topgallant-sails, above which the galleon set nothing. This promised a long, wearisome voyage across the Atlantic, and doubly justified me in transshipping the treasure to the schooner. Nevertheless I looked forward with a great deal of pride to the day when I should take the prize into Weymouth harbour. It was early days, however, to think of that as yet, for there was the whole of the Atlantic and two-thirds of the Caribbean between ourselves and home, with who could say how many chances of shipwreck or capture before that distance could be traversed.

And, as though to enforce the recollection of the latter contingency more effectively upon us, the dawn next morning revealed a long, snake-like two-masted craft hovering some five miles to windward, which I by and by made out to be one of those pestilent war-galleys which were apt to prove such formidable antagonists, and to give so much trouble in such moderate weather as we were then experiencing. I judged that this galley, which was under sail when first sighted, had come out from Cartagena in search of us, and from the fact that she did not at once bear down upon us, but hung persistently to windward, I conjectured that she was not alone, that she had one or more consorts somewhere to windward, and that, upon fully identifying the galleon, she would lower her sails, out

sweeps, and be off to windward for help to tackle us. This I was most anxious to prevent, if possible, and after considering awhile I hit upon a plan which I thought might serve. I accordingly closed with the galleon, and ordered Saunders to at once bear up before the wind and run away to leeward, piling all the sail possible upon the old tub, to convey the impression that he was terribly frightened, and was exceedingly anxious to escape recapture. At the same time all sail was crowded upon the schooner, the precaution being taken, however, to tow an old spare foresail overboard, abreast the lee gangway, which had the effect of causing the schooner to sail as if she were water-logged. I also shaped a course with the schooner diverging about four points from that of the galleon.

The latter now, of course, ran away from us, hand over hand; while now the galley manifested a disposition to edge down a little and get a nearer look at us both. This was precisely what I wanted, my hope being that our precipitate retreat would be construed by the Spaniards as a sign of weakness and fear on our part, and that the commander of the galley would thus be inveigled into attempting the recapture of the galleon single-handed, instead of sharing the honour with his consorts. I anticipated that, if he should yield to my blandishments, he would make a dash straight for the galleon without troubling himself about the schooner, the sluggish movements of which would render her in his eyes an altogether contemptible adversary, utterly beneath his notice, and only to be tackled and submitted to an exemplary punishment after the recapture of the galleon had been achieved. And, should I prove correct in this line of reasoning, he would run away to leeward after the galleon, when I should have him exactly where I wanted him, namely, to leeward of the schooner, when it would be my business to see that he did not again get to windward of us.

Chapter Twenty Five.

I end my career as a privateersman.

For fully an hour the galley dallied with the tempting bait that I had thrown out, now edging down towards us for a few minutes, and anon hauling her wind again, her commander apparently suspecting some ruse on our part. But at length our seemingly single-hearted anxiety to place as much water as possible between ourselves and him, together with the fact that both vessels were perceptibly increasing their distance from

him—the galleon fairly rapidly, the schooner much less so,—got the better of his prudence; and, suddenly putting up his helm, he came booming along down to leeward, wing and wing, steering a course that, as I had expected, would soon carry him alongside the *Señora*.

The moment that it became apparent that he was in earnest I sent my scanty crew to quarters, the long thirty-two was cleared away and loaded, and all hands stood by to haul inboard again the sail that had hitherto served so efficiently as a drag. But, beyond this preparation, no other change was made, the schooner still adhering to her course, as though only anxious to escape from so formidable an adversary.

About half an hour after bearing up, by which time the galley had neared us to within about a mile and a half, she fired a shotted gun in the direction of the galleon, and hoisted her colours. Saunders, to whom I had communicated my intentions, took no notice whatever of this; nor did we. The shot fell a long way short, and was of course merely intended as a hint for the galleon to heave-to. Another quarter of an hour brought the galley down abreast of us, and about a mile distant, but she took no notice whatever of us, her object evidently being to recapture the galleon first, and so secure—as they would suppose—the treasure that had been embarked aboard her; after which her commander would doubtless have a word to say to the schooner which had so audaciously presumed to appropriate, even temporarily, the gold of His Most Catholic Majesty the King of Spain. As the galley swept past us I observed, with keen satisfaction, that she was not going much over eight knots; and I estimated that, when we should have got rid of our drag, we should be fully a knot and a half better than she was. Of course it would be in her power to rig out her sweeps to increase her speed; but I considered that, with the breeze that was then blowing, they would be practically useless except when going directly head to wind; and what I had to do was so to manoeuvre the schooner as to cut off her escape in that direction. What I was chiefly afraid of was that the consorts of the galley—for I was confident that she had consorts somewhere or other—were close enough at hand to hear the sound of firing; and to make certain upon this point I shinned up to the royal-yard and had a good look round, and I was greatly relieved to find that there was nothing in sight.

I allowed her to get about a mile to leeward of us, and then, instead of hauling our drag inboard, as I had at first intended, we cut it adrift and let it go altogether, at the same time jibbing

over our main-boom and giving chase to the galley. For a space of perhaps ten minutes no perceptible notice was taken, by those on board the galley, of our change of tactics; but by the end of that time our sudden and—to the Spaniards—unaccountable improvement in speed had become so marked that it could not fail to attract attention; and presently signs became observable that it was occasioning considerable uneasiness. The galley's sweeps—forty in number—were suddenly rigged out, and she assumed the appearance of a gigantic centipede hurrying over the surface of the sea, her long oars rising and falling swiftly, with a gun-like flash of sunlight off their wet blades, as they churned the water into snow-white foam on each side of her.

But a very few minutes sufficed to prove the correctness of my judgment as to their uselessness under the present circumstances, a very distinct confusion of movement among the shining blades revealing—what I had foreseen—that her canvas was driving her too fast through the water for her oarsmen to keep pace with her. The confusion rapidly became more pronounced, until every individual oar-blade was rising and falling independently of all the others, while frequent pauses of movement, accompanied by a great splashing of water, revealed that the unhappy oarsmen were busily engaged in the unseamanlike operation of “catching crabs”. As a matter of fact, her sweeps were proving to be a hindrance rather than a help to her, and we began to overhaul her so fast that we were soon within point-blank range of her. Tom Hardy had assumed charge of our Long Tom, and he had gradually worked himself up into such an uncontrollable condition of fidgety impatience, running his eye along the sights and then glancing round at me, that it seemed cruel to keep him thus any longer on the tenter-hooks of suspense, and I, rather reluctantly, nodded permission to him to fire. The next instant the gun spoke out, the shock of its discharge jarring the schooner to her keel, and the shot flew high over the mast-heads of the galley and a little wide of her.

“I expected as much, Tom,” remarked I reprovingly. “You are far too much excited. Take it coolly, man; take it coolly. That galley must be effectually disabled, or she will give us the slip to windward and bring two or three more like herself after us, which I have no desire at all to see. And I have no desire to take her, for she would be worse than useless to us, she would be a really dangerous possession. Ah! I expected as much; down comes her canvas; she is going to try to dodge us and work out to windward in the wind's eye! Never mind the gun

just now; in with the stunsails, for your lives, or she will be too quick for us!"

What I feared and expected had come to pass. Our heavy shot had fairly frightened the people aboard the galley; they realised at last that a trick had been played upon them, and her commander's great anxiety now evidently was to get as quickly as possible out of the trap that he had been decoyed into. And, with this object, he had suddenly lowered his sails and put his helm hard over, with the object of returning by the way that he had come. But we were to windward of the galley, and, our stunsails coming in with a run, we were able to haul close upon a wind almost as quickly as the galley, when—the latter now depending upon her oars alone—the schooner proved to be considerably the faster of the two, thus effectually cutting off our antagonist's escape in that direction.

"Now, back to your gun, and load as quickly as you like!" exclaimed I; for I knew that a very critical moment was at hand for us; a moment that would decide whether it was the galley or ourselves that was to be victorious. And presently my anticipation became realised; the Spaniard, finding his escape cut off, again putting over his helm until the vessel swerved round with her long, keen bows pointing straight at us. Her commander intended to run us aboard—if he could—and, should he succeed, the schooner would either be sent to the bottom by the violence of the shock, or we should fall into the hands of the Spaniards, to endure, in all probability, a fate even more horrible than that from which Hoard had escaped.

Straight as an arrow for us came the galley, her two masts keeping steadily in one as her helmsman relentlessly followed the schooner's movement through the water, while the long oar-blades now rose and fell quickly in perfect time, urging the long, snake-like hull toward us at a speed of fully seven knots. Tom Hardy mopped the perspiration of excitement from his brow with a bright red handkerchief as he muttered anathemas upon his previous ill-luck, but I saw that he had pulled himself together, for his hand was as steady as yours is at this moment as he gently waved it in direction of those who were training the gun.

"Now, Tom," said I, when he had reported all ready, "this shot must go home, mind; there must be no missing this time! So take it coolly; let her approach us to within a hundred fathoms before you think of firing—I will give you the word—and then let her have it as soon as you are certain of your aim."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Tom. "I'll have her this time or you may call me a sojer. Give the word, sir, whenever you like."

"There is no hurry, Tom," said I. "Keep her covered for another three minutes, and then you may do as you like. And you, my man," I continued, turning to the helmsman, "steer small for the next few minutes, and give Tom a chance."

"Ay, ay, sir; 'steer small' it is!" answered the man.

"They're at work upon that gun of theirs, sir," reported Hardy at this moment. "Shall I fire and stop 'em, sir?"

"Yes," said I; "she will do now. But don't fire until you are absolutely certain of her."

The galley was now within about a hundred and fifty fathoms of us, coming on at a tremendous pace, the water leaping and foaming and glancing about her bows, and her long length still pointed obstinately at us. There was a brass gun mounted upon her forecastle, the rays of the sun flashing off it as though it had been made of gold; and about this gun some seven or eight figures could be distinctly seen busily moving; while aft upon her poop were grouped four men in brilliant uniforms and with their swords drawn. And beyond her forecastle, grouped along either rail, could be just made out the heads and the flashing weapons of a strong body of boarders, ready to spring in upon our decks at the instant when the two hulls should come together. Despite the anxiety and suspense of the moment I could not help remarking to myself that, if they intended to carry us by boarding, the commander of the galley was conning his craft in a very lubberly, unseamanlike way.

As the thought passed through my brain there was a bright flash, a stunning report, and a jarring of the whole frame of the schooner as our long gun again spoke out; and, so instantly following the report that it seemed to be almost a part of it, I distinctly heard a crash, immediately followed by a dreadful outcry of screams and yells and groans of mortal anguish, seeming all to start at the same instant out of a hundred throats. Our shot had evidently gone home, and it had as evidently told severely; but exactly how much damage it had done could not be guessed at for the moment until our smoke had blown away to leeward of the galley. And ere it had done this there came a flash and a report from her, and the next instant I was aware of a shot that came humming so closely past my head that the wind of it actually blew my cap off and all

but overboard. I stooped, picked it up, and replaced it on my head.

As I again turned my gaze to leeward, there was the galley, with a clean, neat shot-hole in her starboard bow, so close to the water-line that the furrow ploughed up by her rush through the water was flashing and leaping right over it; and—what was of at least equal importance to us just then—both banks of oars were trailing limp and motionless, as if suddenly paralysed, in the water alongside of her. And paralysed they certainly were, for the moment at least, because our thirty-two-pound shot had evidently raked the oarsmen's benches from end to end of the ship. Her way immediately began to slacken; and although I saw an officer dash aft and with his own hands jam the helm hard over to lay us aboard, her movements became so sluggish that we had no difficulty in avoiding her, she being fully ten fathoms distant when she went drifting slowly across our stern. As she did so, a heavy, confused volley of musketry was poured into us from the borders that lined her gunwale, but although the bullets flew past us like hail, not one of us was touched; and immediately afterwards a loud outcry arose aboard the galley, upon which every man at once threw down his arms and jumped below.

"Ready about!" shouted I. "And you, Tom, load again, and stand by to give her another shot as we cross her bows. We must not leave her now until we have rendered it impossible for her to get up to windward again and tell of our whereabouts, and that of the galleon. If you could contrive to smash a good number of her oars with a raking shot it would be better even than hulling her; for, after all, it would be a terrible thing to destroy so much life. She must have at least two hundred and fifty people aboard her."

"Ay; all that—or more, sir. It'll take at least four men to handle one of them long, heavy sweeps, the way that they was handled just now. But, as to smashing of 'em, I don't know as I can do it; a man would have to be a very tidy shot to hit more'n one or two of 'em. But I'll do my best, sir; and no man can't do no more."

The schooner's helm was put down, and she was hove round upon the opposite tack, and at once kept away for the galley, which had by this time fallen broadside-on to the sea, her oars still remaining motionless. We steered a little to leeward of her, with the intention of luffing into the wind athwart her stern and throwing our topsail aback, so giving Hardy time to level and point his thirty-two-pounder; and we had gained our position

and were in the act of backing our topsail, when the officer of whom I have already spoken reappeared upon the poop and, hastily hauling down the galley's colours, hailed in very fair English:

"We surrender, señor; we surrender! In the name of the Blessed Virgin I pray you not to fire again! The galley is in a sinking condition; and unless we can quickly stop the leak she will go down and drown us all. What is it you will that we shall do in the matter?"

"Where is the leak situated?" demanded I.

"In the bow, señor; so close to the water-line that the sea is pouring into the vessel like a river," was the answer.

"Then," said I, "you had better cut both your sails adrift and fother them over the leak; after which your only chance of safety will be to make for the nearest port—which I take to be Porto Bello. I will stand by you until you have choked the leak; but I can do no more for you, as my carpenter is aboard the galleon; and moreover he does not understand Spanish, and therefore could not direct your people."

"A thousand thanks, señor," answered the Spaniard, bowing low to me. "I will follow your instructions, and am in hopes that, by adopting the plan you have suggested, we may be able to reach the land."

Then, with another bow to me, which I duly returned, he disappeared; and a moment later I heard him shouting some orders to his people, some twenty or thirty of whom at once sprang on deck and began to cut the lateen sails away from the long, tapering yards. Meanwhile, I could now see that the galley was gradually filling, as she was perceptibly deeper in the water than when we had first encountered her; and thinking it possible that I might be of use, I ordered our people to launch the dinghy, in which, with one hand, I went under the bows of the galley. The shot-hole which was the cause of all the mischief was now completely under water more than half the time, showing only when the bows of the vessel lifted over a swell. I saw that they had plugged it with canvas from the inside, and the officer informed me that two men were engaged in holding the canvas in place against the pressure of the water, while the rest of the crew were, as I could see, engaged in baling. I thought I could see my way to improve matters a little; so I directed the officer to launch his gun overboard, to lift the bows a little, and to shift all his movable weight as far aft as possible.

I then returned to the schooner, and procured a thin sheet of lead, a dozen nails, and a hammer, and with these I contrived, with some difficulty, to pretty well stop the leak, although I was careful not to stop it too effectually, lest the officer should decide to take the risk of making his way to windward instead of to the nearest land. But I do not think I had any real ground for apprehension, for I could see that the poor fellow was thoroughly frightened; and when I had patched up the hole, and had told him that there would be no need to use the sails, save to help him to reach Porto Bello as quickly as possible, he was overpoweringly profuse in his expressions of gratitude for my help and what he was pleased to term my "generosity."

It was drawing well on toward noon when at length the galley was once more in a condition to get under weigh, which she did forthwith, heading to the southward under oars and sails; and inexpressibly thankful was I to see the last of her, and still more so to think that I had contrived to get rid of her without sending her and all her company to the bottom. Before parting I contrived to elicit from her commander that two of his consorts had proceeded to search for us in the Gulf of Darien, while three more had made the best of their way to Point Gallinas, to intercept us there in the event of our trying to make our way to the eastward.

Having thus successfully shaken off our formidable foe, I crowded sail upon the schooner in pursuit of the galleon—which all this while had, in pursuance of my orders, been running off the wind to leeward,—and when at length we overtook her, the galley had long vanished in the south-eastern board. We consequently hauled up to the northward once more, and shaped a course for Jamaica, where,—not to make the story too long,—we arrived without further adventure on the fourth morning after our encounter with the galley.

As may be supposed, I lost no time in waiting upon my very good friend, the Admiral; whom I found up to the eyes in business in his office at Port Royal. Nevertheless, busy though he was, he gave orders for me to be admitted, and shook hands with me heartily as I presented myself.

"Good morning, Mr Bowen," said he. "I won't ask you to sit down, for I am so busy this morning that I positively don't know which job to tackle first. I merely consented to see you in order that I might congratulate you—for I hear that you have brought in a prize of some sort, and a big lump of a craft she is, too," casting his eyes toward her as she lay full in view of his office window. "Not the galleon, though, I suppose? No such luck—

What? is it really so? Upon my honour, I very heartily congratulate you, my dear sir, I do indeed. And my ears are tingling to hear your story, which I am certain will be well worth listening to; but I haven't the time for it just now. Come up to the Pen to dinner to-night, and tell it me then, will you? That's right; sharp seven, mind! And now, good-bye until this evening, you lucky young dog!"

Upon leaving the Admiral, I proceeded up the harbour to Kingston in a boat manned by negroes. A large fleet of ships of all sizes occupied the anchorage abreast of the town; and as we drew nearer two vessels seemed to stand out from among the rest and challenge my recognition. I looked at them more intently. Surely I could not be mistaken!

"Cuffee, what are the names of those two vessels—the brigantine and the schooner—that are moored close together there?" demanded I of the captain of the boat.

"My name not Cuffee, sah; my name am Julius Caesar Mark Anthony Brown, sah! And dem two vessels am called respectably de *Dolphin* and de *Tiger*; bofe of dem privateers, sah," was the boatman's answer, given with great dignity and the utmost gravity.

"Thank you, Julius Caesar Mark Anthony Brown," retorted I, with equal gravity. "Have the goodness to shove me alongside the *Dolphin*, will you?"

"Certainly, sah; wid de utmost pleasure, sah," answered the negro, with a broad grin of delight at the unwonted receipt of his full cognomen. And in a few minutes we ranged up alongside the old familiar schooner, and I recognised many old familiar faces looking curiously down into the boat.

"By the living jingo if it ain't Mr Bowen come back to life!" I heard one man say; and in a moment there was an eager rush to the gangway to meet me. The unexpected sight of so many well-known faces, most of them hailing from the same birthplace as myself, and all of them evidently glad to see me again, moved me strongly; and almost before I knew where I was I found myself on deck and heartily shaking hands all round. Then, as soon as the excitement had abated somewhat, I inquired for Captain Winter.

"He is ashore, Mr Bowen," answered the mate, who had caught my name and evidently appeared to be familiar with it, although the man was a total stranger to me. "He went ashore directly

after breakfast, and I don't much expect to see him aboard again until pretty late in the afternoon. But I expect you'll find him and Cap'n Comben either at Anderson's store, or at Mammy Williamson's hotel. Or, if you don't find 'em, you'll be sure to get news of 'em at one or the other of them two places."

"Thank you," said I; "I will look them up. But in case I should not find them, please say that I will call aboard again to-morrow morning about nine o'clock."

So saying, I climbed down into Julius Caesar's boat again, and ten minutes later was landed upon the wharf.

It was by this time drawing well on toward noon, or "second breakfast" time; so I shaped a course for Mammy Williamson's in the first place; and there, sure enough, I came upon my old skipper and Comben, seated at table among a number of other ship-masters and a sprinkling of civilians. As I entered I heard my name mentioned by Winter, and thought I also caught the word "galleon."

"Speak of an angel, Captain Winter, and—you know the rest," said I, as I stepped up to him with outstretched hand.

In a moment every man had started to his feet, and I was surrounded—hemmed in—by an enthusiastic crowd, who, having somehow got wind of my lucky capture, were eager to congratulate me. Nothing would do but I must sit down and take breakfast with them and relate my adventure; and it was past two o'clock that day before any of us budged. For not only had I to tell the whole story of my doings from the day when I parted company in the *Manilla*, but I also had to hear Captain Winter's story as well. The latter I shall not relate here, as it would require a whole volume to do justice to it; but for the gratification of the reader's curiosity, I may say that the *Dolphin* and the *Tiger*, after a protracted fight, in which both suffered severely, succeeded in beating off the French frigate. Since then they had both been knocking about in the Atlantic, with only moderate success, making Barbados their head-quarters; hence they had heard nothing of me save in a letter received from Mr White, in which he stated that, up to the time of writing, no news had been received of the *Manilla*, and that he greatly feared she must have been lost or captured.

Having at length transacted the business that had taken me to Kingston, I returned to the schooner pretty late in the afternoon, Winter and Comben accompanying me to have a look at the galleon and the *Sword Fish*; and later on I returned with

them to Kingston to keep my dinner appointment with the Admiral.

I found my host, as usual, with his table full of company, among them being the captain of the *Triton* frigate, and several other naval officers, all of whom were exceedingly civil to me, especially after I had related the particulars of the capture of the galleon. We spent a very pleasant evening; and when at length the guests rose to go, the Admiral whispered to me to remain as he had something to say to me. Accordingly, when all hands but myself had left, my host conducted me to what he called his "snuggery", which was a corner of his spacious verandah inclosed with large glazed partitions, and fitted up as a smoking-room. His negro butler set out the table with glasses, decanters, a big crystal jug of sangaree, and a box of cigars, and left us.

As soon as we were alone and had made ourselves comfortable, the old gentleman turned to me, seemed to look me through and through for several seconds, so intently did he rivet his gaze upon me, and then he remarked:

"I dare say you are wondering what this important matter can be that has caused me to keep you behind in order that I may have an opportunity to talk it over with you. Well, my dear fellow, I am a poor hand at beating about the bush; if I have a thing to say, I like to say it outright; so tell me, now, has it ever occurred to you to wish that you were a king's officer, instead of being merely a privateersman?"

"Upon my word, Sir Peter, that is a strange question indeed to ask," said I; "but I do not mind confessing to you that I have over and over again regretted that circumstances did not permit me to enter His Majesty's service. Not that I have any real cause to complain, for I suppose I may now call myself a fairly rich man, with the division of the galleon's prize-money in prospect; much richer than I should have been by this time had I had an opportunity to enter the navy. At the same time I have been impressed over and over again with the honour and distinction attaching to His Most Gracious Majesty's service, and which are wholly apart from any question of the length of a man's purse; and it is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that, if a man happens to be ambitious, there is no service where his ambition has more scope for gratification than in the British navy."

"Precisely," agreed the Admiral. "And do you happen to be ambitious?"

"Yes," I answered frankly. "Every one of my successes, such as they have been, has been robbed of a very appreciable amount of its sweetness by the reflection of the far greater honour and glory that would have been mine had I happened to have been a wearer of the King's uniform."

"Then," said the Admiral, "may I take it that, if an opportunity were to offer for you to enter the King's service, you would accept it?"

"Undoubtedly you may, sir," answered I excitedly, as the drift of the conversation suggested itself to me for the first time. Then, in a flash, I qualified my statement by adding: "Of course I mean if I could enter as a commissioned officer. As a warrant-officer I fear I should be quite out of place. I have had so much liberty, and have been, so to speak, my own master for so long—"

"That you think you would find the discipline irksome?" interrupted the Admiral. "My dear boy, I have no doubt you would, and nobody but a fool would ever think of spoiling a fine, dashing, young fellow like yourself by attempting any such transformation. As you say, you would be woefully out of place in such a position. You would be wasted. But upon your own quarter-deck, with a good crew of thoroughly disciplined men to back you up, and the authority of the King's commission to give you confidence, you would soon make a name and a place for yourself. Now, you did a very important and valuable service to the State when you brought timely intelligence of the approach of the combined French and Spanish fleets to West Indian waters, and you did a still more important and valuable service in watching that fleet, and afterwards communicating with Lord Nelson. In recognition of those services, therefore, it affords me very great pleasure to offer you a commission as lieutenant in His Majesty's navy. There it is, my boy," producing a large official-looking document from his pocket; "and I sincerely hope that you will not only accept it, but that also, with such friendly help as I may be able to afford you, you will rapidly distinguish yourself and do credit to my penetration in selecting you for so unusual an honour."

For the moment I was altogether too thoroughly overwhelmed to utter a word, which the old gentleman at once perceived, for he said hastily:

"There, there! no thanks, no thanks; I know exactly what you are struggling to say, and I will take it as said. You need not trouble to thank me in words. Let your deeds express your

gratitude; and if you behave as well under the pennant as you have hitherto done under the merchant flag, I shall be more than satisfied. And I intend to give you every opportunity of distinguishing yourself and doing me credit. For it happens that the *Triton's* boats captured a becalmed pirate schooner last week, and brought her in. The lieutenant who led the attack lost his life, poor fellow, in boarding, so that he has not to be considered; and I propose, therefore, to purchase the craft into the service and give you the command of her. She sails like a witch, I am told, and is a wonderfully powerful vessel, just the sort of craft to give a smart, young fellow like yourself every chance to race up the ratlines of promotion. So now, all that you have to do is to arrange somehow to be relieved of your present command as soon as possible, and then to step into your new berth."

This I had no difficulty whatever in doing, thanks to the lucky chance of Captain Winter being in the same port. I slept at the Pen that night, my kind friend, the Admiral, insisting upon my so doing; and the next evening I found myself in a position to inform him that all arrangements had been made to relieve me of the command of the *Sword Fish*, and to take the galleon home to England. And within forty-eight hours of the receipt of my commission I had entered upon my new career, and had ceased to be a privateersman.

The End.
